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Wisconsin State Journal, August 25, 2008 "Wisconsin Institutes for Medical Research's first tower opens next week," by David Wahlberg

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Wisconsin Institutes for Medical Research's first tower opens next week

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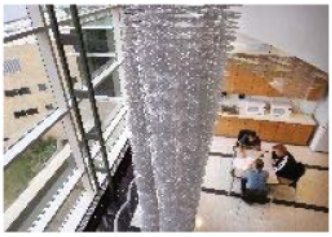
Some 500 scientists from a variety of fields — medicine, physics, biology, chemistry, engineering and more — will work in a medical research building to open next week near UW Hospital, most of them focusing on cancer.

The seven-story, $185 million facility is the beginning of the planned Wisconsin Institutes for Medical Research, one of the largest projects ever in Madison.

The three-tower complex, to be finished by about 2015, will house 1,500 lab workers and cost more than $600 million, officials say. More than $10 million in state money has been spent; another $72 million is being requested, with a plan to seek $150 million more.



John Maniaci -- State Journal

"Strings," a sculpture by Cliff Garten, extends from floors three to seven in the first building of the Wisconsin Institutes for Medical Research. The building opens next week near UW Hospital. The $185 million facility, the first of three planned towers, is designed to bring scientists from many disciplines together to solve complex problems. Several open areas, like the atrium pictured, are meant to foster collaboration.

> The massive project, which will also feature research on heart disease, brain disorders and other conditions, will move many researchers from aging buildings on the UW-Madison campus.

By working near doctors and patients at UW Hospital, the scientists should more quickly develop and test new ways to prevent and treat diseases, officials say.

"We will be a different medical school when we are done," said Dr. Paul DeLuca, associate dean for research and graduate studies at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. "This is clearly the wave of the future."

The medical school in June launched a $500 million capital campaign to build the two remaining towers and pay for other programs.

Fostering collaboration

Construction of the first tower began in 2005, when the project was known as the Interdisciplinary Research Complex.

Most of the building will be devoted to cancer research, with prostate cancer the focus on the seventh floor and breast cancer on the sixth floor. Floors three and four will be for scientists studying childhood cancers and cancers of the blood, lungs, head and neck.

The fifth floor will initially house researchers specializing in surgery — such as orthopedics researcher Wan-Ju Li, who is trying to grow adult stem cells into cartilage.

Lab equipment and mechanicals will be on the second floor. Radiation and imaging machines for research, diagnosis and treatment, including CT, MRI and PET scanners, will be on the first floor and a basement level.

The cancer floors will bring together scientists who previously worked mostly with others in their own discipline. The hope is that by combining efforts, they can better tackle complicated problems. Each floor's long rows of labs have no walls, which is meant to foster collaboration.

"The intent is to get people from different research perspectives mixing together and hopefully to get ideas that wouldn't

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emerge otherwise," said Dr. George Wilding, director of the UW Carbone Comprehensive Cancer Center, which is moving its headquarters from UW Hospital to the new building.

Dr. Mark Ritter, a prostate cancer researcher who specializes in radiation therapy, will work on the seventh floor with Jamey Weichert, a chemist, and Robert Jeraj, a physicist.

They will use contrast agents and imaging machines to try to track tumors by their metabolic states, not only their size and shape. The idea is to tailor treatments to cancer patients based on their specific type of tumor.

Some scientists on the same floor will use nanotechnology to better grow prostate cancer cells in lab dishes. Others will study prostate cancer vaccines, which aim to boost a patient's immune system to better target cancer.

Ritter said he's looking forward to the joint efforts. "In the past, we've only seen each other in the hallway or on an elevator once in a while," he said.

Weichert is co-founder of Cellectar, a Madison company developing small molecules to light up tumors and shrink them. A study of a promising molecule has started in patients with lung cancer, and similar trials for prostate and pancreatic cancers will begin soon, Weichert said.

Bringing discoveries to patients and commercializing the ideas are a big thrust of the new institutes. "The old days of working in a dark lab with fruit flies without a clinical endpoint are gone," Weickert said.

The new building is also a recruitment tool, said Wilding, the cancer center director.

Dr. Mark Burkard, who recently finished his postgraduate training at the prestigious Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, considered jobs there and elsewhere but chose UW-Madison, largely because of the new facility.

He'll be on the sixth floor, studying targeted therapies for breast cancer.

"At a lot of other cancer centers, the researchers in the labs are well separated from the clinics," Burkard said. "Here the idea is to bring basic research right next to the hospital."

The next two towers

The interdisciplinary research theme will continue in the two other towers, said DeLuca, the medical school associate dean.

The second tower will feature research on cardiovascular disease, neuroscience, molecular medicine and regenerative medicine, he said.

The two lower levels of the second tower already have been built, along with the first tower. They provide space for animal research.

In the third tower, scientists will come together from the schools of pharmacy, engineering and veterinary science and the College of Agricultural & Life Sciences. Two floors of that tower might be purchased by University Research Park, DeLuca said.

But first, money for construction must be raised.

The medical school has asked the state for $72 million for the second tower and plans to seek $150 million for the third. Both amounts are half of each tower's estimated cost, DeLuca said.

Gov. Jim Doyle supports allocating more state money to the complex, but it's too early to say how much, said Doyle spokesman Lee Sensenbrenner.

The medical school's capital campaign will raise the remainder of the funds, DeLuca said.

For the first tower, General Electric and the Oscar Rennebohm Foundation contributed $15 million. About $18 million in federal grants also helped pay for construction, DeLuca said. Those grants are not as easy to get now, he said.

DeLuca acknowledged the scope of the project, its price tag and the capital campaign's goal can seem staggering. But he said he's confident the money will be found and the complex will put a Wisconsin stamp on future medical advances.

"There has been tremendous skepticism about this," he said. "But it's a very realistic number."

The complex, when finished, will encompass nearly 1 million square feet. That's nearly the same size as the 12-story, $190 million University Square, a mixed-use facility just finished off University Avenue. UW Hospital, when it opened in 1979, had 1.5 million square feet.

The $600 million-plus price tag for the Wisconsin Institutes for Medical Research incorporates special building designs to accommodate research, and it factors in inflation into future construction costs.