

Regents Approve Plan for New UCSD Inpatient Bed Tower

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The University of California Board of Regents today voted to approve UC San Diego's request to move forward with planning a new inpatient bed tower on their UC San Diego East Campus medical complex.

The proposed project would build 125-150 new beds as an extension of the current 119-bed facility on the East Campus. The next phase of planning will result in project specifications that will be brought back to the Regents for final project approval some time in the next 12-18 months.

"These plans will enable us to continue to fulfill our important academic and clinical missions," said UC San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox. "We are also committed to working with our community on options to continue providing access to our services for patients throughout our region."

At the Regents' Building and Ground Committee on Tuesday, where the item was first presented, Regent Stephen Schreiner acknowledged the community discussion that has taken place surrounding this project, saying "I have followed this plan for at least a year and the current version is testament to the fact that UCSD's representatives have been willing to work with the community on this excellent project."

"This project is important for the UCSD Medical Center to move forward with its planned expansion and improvement projects at the UCSD Medical Center in Hillcrest, and on the East Campus," said UC San Diego Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences David Brenner, M.D. "We are committed to providing access to high quality care in state-of-the-art facilities. This new bed tower will allow us to operate all of our 505 licensed beds, which is impossible today due to facility limitations."

The need to open additional hospital beds to serve a growing patient population is one of the reasons this project is important, according to UCSD Medical Center Chief Executive Officer Richard Liekweg, who is responsible for UCSD's 386-bed UCSD Medical Center-Hillcrest hospital,

the 119-bed UCSD Thornton Hospital, and a range of specialty diagnostic and treatment services including a Level 1 Trauma Center, Burn Center, and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

“Both of our hospitals frequently operate at capacity,” he explained. “Because it was designed and built nearly 50 years ago, the Hillcrest facility is inadequate to meet the needs of patients today, so in addition to building a new bed tower on the East Campus, we are investing over \$80 million to upgrade the Hillcrest hospital so that it is both comfortable and compliant with current earthquake standards.” These enhancements include expansion of the emergency department, NICU, the post-surgical recovery area, and improvements in diagnostic imaging and the Labor and Delivery unit.

After the planned completion of the new inpatient tower by 2014, UCSD Medical Center will continue to operate two hospitals, each with approximately 250-beds, for at least the next 20 years, said Liekweg. Further planning will be conducted over that time frame to develop options for meeting the growing patient demand for high-tech outpatient services, which is the trend in medicine today, and for replacing the Hillcrest hospital after 2030, when it no longer meets the state’s earthquake standards.

In addition, Brenner said, as the only academic medical center in the region, UC San Diego’s long-term objective is to build a major University Medical Center on the East Campus in proximity to the School of Medicine and Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, to better integrate the University’s extensive clinical programs and regional specialty centers with its educational and biomedical research programs.

The possibility of building new beds on the Hillcrest campus or operating beds south of Interstate 8 in partnership with other providers will be among the options explored over the next two decades of planning, he added.

“San Diego’s population is growing and aging, so we recognize we might need to expand our bed capacity in addition to improving access to outpatient and emergency services,” said Brenner. “The fact remains that the Hillcrest hospital will eventually need to be replaced. When the time comes, we remain open to operating two hospitals in order to meet the health needs of our patients and the region. But, this will require continuing dialogue with the community and our health care colleagues to help determine how to fund such an expansion, and how we can best collaborate to ensure that the County’s healthcare resources are effectively and efficiently utilized to meet the needs of patients throughout San Diego.”

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