

BMT Patients Get a Space to Call their Own

By Yadira Galindo | January 06, 2015

When UC San Diego Jacobs Medical Center opens in 2016, blood and marrow transplant patients will have spacious rooms with panoramic views of La Jolla. The 36 private rooms on the sixth floor will provide patients with space for loved ones to remain by their side over the course of the treatment period, which can last three to four weeks.

Although it is called a transplant, a [blood and marrow transplantation](#) (BMT) is not an operation. It is an infusion of blood stem cells through a small tube or catheter into a person's vein. A BMT is used to replace bone marrow that has been destroyed by disease, chemotherapy or radiation.



To help with the recovery of a transplant, the air on the new BMT floor will be positively pressurized and specially filtered to help reduce the risk of infection for patients with compromised immune function. These measures will allow patients to leave their treatment room, walk around open areas of the unit and visit with family and friends.

“Right now, patients can leave their room during certain periods in their treatment but only if they wear a mask because of their vulnerability to infection during this time,” said [Edward Ball, MD](#), director of the UC San Diego Blood and Marrow Transplantation Program. “With the purified air (in the Jacobs BMT unit) there will be no living things, no viruses and no bacteria floating around. Patients can leave the room and not worry about getting sick. When people are stuck in a room for so long, these differences are critical.”

From a medical perspective, not only will physicians be more at ease that their patients are mingling outside of their rooms, the BMT floor will offer the ability to provide a higher level of care. Physicians will be able to do more in one place, keeping patients relaxed and in a familiar environment. Patients will no longer have to be whisked off to another floor for cardiac monitoring, for example.

“I think it will be an outstanding facility that will make patients happy and make their stay more pleasant, which may even help their outcomes and treatment,” said Ball.

The BMT floor is part of the Pauline and Stanley Foster cancer care unit, one of three designated clinical care areas in Jacobs Medical Center, an \$839 million, 10-story facility on the university's La

Jolla campus. More than 1,000 donors have contributed \$131 million to this project, which is the largest hospital project currently underway in Southern California.

The state-of-the-art facility will be the critical inpatient venue for the delivery of scientific discoveries and compassionate care to cancer patients and their families, and provide the community with a broad array of leading-edge treatments, such as stem cell-directed clinical translational research and T cell therapies that harness a patient's own immune system to attack cancer cells, said Ball.



A scanning electron micrograph of human blood with red blood cells, T cells (orange) and platelets (green). Image courtesy of Zeiss Microscopy.

The joint [UC San Diego Health and Sharp HealthCare blood and marrow transplant program](#) is the largest in San Diego, one of the largest in California, and a national leader in physician expertise and state-of-the-art treatment. Since 1989, more than 2,000 transplants have been performed here.

Aran Tavakoli, RN, interim BMT clinical nurse manager, believes the Jacobs Medical Center's BMT unit will be more patient- and family-centered by offering open spaces, lots of natural light and a kitchen with a refrigerator and microwave, allowing families to bring their own food. During treatment, said Tavakoli, patients' taste buds change and having something

they enjoy provides a bit of comfort and necessary nutrition.

The sixth floor was designed by an interdisciplinary team that included physicians, nurses and even physical therapists to help with work flow and give patients more to do, said Tavakoli. Part of the plans includes a gym for patients to be active with stationary bikes, stairs and balance bars.

"I think having the gym and multipurpose rooms will make it feel more like a community," said Tavakoli. "Right now, a lot of patients will chat in the hallway as they walk in the unit, but they don't have a place to sit outside of their room."

Patients have asked for a place to work out during their stay in the hospital, said Ball. "We're always asking patients to get up and walk around to aid in their recovery and to give them something to do."

The cancer care unit in [Jacobs Medical Center](#) will be the needed inpatient component to complement UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center, the only National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center in San Diego, and the capstone of the university's cancer campus.

Most cancer patients are hospitalized at some point during their cancer journey. By virtue of their close proximity, the cancer care unit and Moores Cancer Center can seamlessly align patient care

by providing a familiar and healing environment, expert physicians and staff, and personalized cancer care with a continuum of services tailored to the needs of patients and their families, including treatment, clinical trials, nutrition, family support and other outpatient programs at Moores Cancer Center.

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