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NIU board moves ahead on cancer treatment center

By Chronicle Staff

The Northern Illinois University Board of Trustees approved Thursday a series of resolutions allowing the university's planned cancer treatment and research center to move forward.

The \$160 million Northern Illinois Proton Treatment & Research Center is slated to be built on 13 acres at the DuPage National Technology Park in West Chicago. It will use proton therapy, a highly advanced form of radiation treatment, to treat cancer.

Proton therapy, which uses concentrated proton beams to target tumors, is considered an effective treatment for numerous adult and pediatric cancers, according to an NIU news release. Unlike some other treatment methods, the therapy reportedly is painless, targeted and noninvasive.

It is currently offered at only five facilities nationwide, though more centers are being built or planned. The NIU center would be the first proton therapy facility in the state.

"Illinois needs a world-class, university-based proton therapy facility," health care executive and NIU Board of Trustees Chair Cheryl G. Murer said in a statement.

On Thursday, the board urged the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board to approve the center's application quickly, and recommended the business arm of the center proceed with negotiations to get the facility built, staffed and equipped.

In addition to treating patients, the nonprofit facility is planned to be a world-class research and training center. The university has received \$7.3 million in federal funds to develop education and training programs in proton therapy.

"I don't think I'm overstating the issue when I say this is one of the most important endeavors the university has ever undertaken," NIU President John Peters said in a statement.

University officials said they hope to break ground on the center in late spring. The facility is slated to open in 2010, and is expected to treat as many as 1,500 patients a year.



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