Another bastion of research
Cincinnati looks to give Ohio a third comprehensive cancer center
Monday, May 19, 2008 3:04 AM
By Suzanne Hoholik
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The University of Cincinnati's CARE/Crawley building adds 240,000 square feet of research and educational space. Architect
Kent Mitchell meets with Dr. Susan Waltz, director of oncology research in the university's Surgery Department, on a walkway connecting it to the medical sciences building.

Dr. Denise Adams meets with Emma Knight, 9, and her father, Steve Knight, at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. The NCI designation would mean child patients could be treated in the same system through adulthood.

CINCINNATI -- Ohio has two nationally recognized cancer-research centers. If medical leaders in Cincinnati have their way, there will be one more.

The University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, across the street from each other, are working together to gain designation as a comprehensive cancer center by the National Cancer Institute.

The label is prestigious: There are 42 comprehensive cancer centers nationwide. Along with prestige comes long-term support from the institute and grant money that often attracts additional research dollars.

The Cincinnati partnership would bring two research programs and hospitals closer together. Physicians at Children's are professors at the University of Cincinnati. The designation would allow child cancer patients to be treated through adulthood within the same system.

It could take a decade to get there, but officials at both centers say the research designation would mean better patient care for the people of southwestern Ohio and nearby Kentucky and Indiana.

But Cincinnati's venture would likely compete for research dollars with the state's two existing NCI-designated comprehensive cancer centers: Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, named in 1987, and Ohio State University, designated in 1976.

Dr. David Stern, vice president for health affairs and dean of the College of Medicine at Cincinnati, said there is room for all three.
"There's more than enough disease and research to go around," he said. "We don't view this as competition."

But universities across the nation have acknowledged that one way to attract the best scientists is to have state-of-the-art facilities and the right federal designation.

Ohio State and Cincinnati both have new 10-story research buildings to accommodate scientists and their teams.

"The recruits want to know that you're serious about their program," said Lee Ann Liska, executive director at Cincinnati's University Hospital.

Dr. Michael Caligiuri, executive director of the OSU Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital, said such duplication might be too much for one city, but not for a state such as Ohio.

He said he welcomes the Cincinnati plan and hopes that the center can bring more talented people to Ohio.

As an example, Stern said, he brought a person he was recruiting to Columbus to meet Caligiuri.

"The three of us went to dinner and we tried to sell him on the cancer programs in Ohio," Caligiuri said. "I can't imagine a football program helping another program get a recruit."

Dr. Franklin Smith, director of hematology/oncology at Cincinnati Children's, agrees.

"This is about research, not market share," he said.

Shuk-mei Ho left the University of Massachusetts and brought with her $5 million in grants to Cincinnati. She leads the university's Environmental Health Department.

Dr. Michael Edwards, a cancer surgeon, left the University of Arkansas to direct the university's Surgery Department, and Jorge Moscat, a world-renowned molecular biologist, left the Spanish National Research Council for Cincinnati.

The "comprehensive cancer center" designation is about research -- lab work, focus on local population and clinical research. Some NCI-designated cancer centers do not treat patients.

Ohio State and Case do, though. And so would Cincinnati.

Patients at the James benefit from the research at Ohio State. Case Western is partners with University Hospitals of Cleveland.
and the Cleveland Clinic.

In Cincinnati, cancer patients at University Hospital and Cincinnati Children's already benefit from research going on in nearby buildings, officials there say.

Linda Weiss, chief of the NCI Cancer Centers Branch, said more than 20 centers currently are seeking a federal designation.

Cincinnati leaders are using a combined $60 million from the university, Cincinnati Children's and University Hospital to build a leadership team and create specific research programs in areas including brain and lung cancer, and leukemia.

Weiss said one key component is a commitment to research, made evident by research grants. She said a minimum of $4 million in annual research grants is required, but centers receiving the designation have on average about $20 million for research.

shoholik@dispatch.com