

Puerto Rico unveils \$200M center to treat, research cancer

November 17 2016, by Danica Coto

Puerto Rico is opening a long-awaited \$200 million cancer treatment and research center that aims to serve patients across the Western Hemisphere with more affordable treatment than on the U.S. mainland, officials said Thursday.

The center is expected to improve treatment of a disease that is the number one cause of death in Puerto Rico, which has disproportionately high numbers of uterine, colorectal and other types of cancer.

Officials with the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center provided guidance to the U.S. territory's government as it built the Hospital of the Comprehensive Cancer Center of the University of Puerto Rico. The hospital will serve patients from the Caribbean region and Latin America while the center aims to attract scientists from around the world to conduct clinical trials and research cancers that affect Latinos at a higher rate, said Gov. Alejandro Garcia Padilla.

"The center represents a before and after in the fight against cancer for all of Latin America," he said.

The nearly 300,000-square-foot (28,000-square-meter) 10-floor center is scheduled to open in mid-December, more than a decade after it was established as a public corporation.

It will feature 96 beds, 26 chemotherapy spaces, eight operation rooms and the island's first 24-hour oncological emergency room, among other

things. It will also have an imaging center and will allow health officials to collect more detailed statistics on cancer. Garcia said the center will serve as a one-stop shop for all the medical services that cancer patients might need. The center expects to generate up to \$80 million a year and could become self-sufficient in three years, said Dr. Luis Clavell, the center's executive director, adding that it will feature technologies including pressurized rooms to prevent the spread of germs.

"This is an opportunity for Puerto Rico to be at the forefront," he said.

So far, 50 doctors have committed to working at the center, and Clavell said that number is expected to double despite a worsening exodus of doctors to the U.S. mainland. The number of doctors in Puerto Rico has dropped from 14,000 to 9,000 in the past decade, the majority leaving for higher salaries and lower living costs.

Overall, the U.S. territory has boosted its manufacturing and biotechnology sectors in recent years despite struggling to emerge from a decade-long economic and fiscal crisis.

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