What does $225M buy? N.J. hospital says 137,000 square feet and ‘top-quality’ care.

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Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center broke ground Tuesday on a $225 million, 137,000-square-foot cancer center scheduled to be completed in three years.

The free-standing cancer center in Livingston will offer everything from medical, surgical and radiation services to yoga, music therapy, and a wig and prosthetic studio.

Hospital officials say it will be the northern oncology hub of RWJ Barnabas Health, of which Cooperman is part, and hope it will become “a regional destination for top-quality cancer care.”

A key goal is to treat the patient, not just the disease, by offering programs focused on self-care, said Dr. Alison Gramm, chair of Cooperman Barnabas’ radiation oncology department.
The hospital’s current cancer services are spread out in different parts of the medical center. The new five-story facility will centralize them, hospital officials say, resulting in a more seamless experience for medical teams and their patients. The new cancer center is part of what hospital officials call the “ongoing transformation of the medical campus.”

“Part of what we’re limited by is actual space right now,” Grann said. “We just do not have enough space to see the patients that need to be seen, or do the procedures that need to be done. So having more space will enable us to enhance the patient experience and give patient care in a timely way.”

Cooperman Barnabas works in partnership with Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the only comprehensive cancer care center in the state designated by the National Cancer Institute. There are 71 NCI-designated cancer centers in the U.S.

The designation is granted to demonstrated “scientific leadership in laboratory and clinical research and [for] serving their communities and the broader public by integrating training and education for biomedical researchers and health care professionals,” according to the institute.

Cooperman Barnabas’ planned cancer center will offer short- and long-term stays and will eliminate the need to travel for more advanced treatments that might not be easily accessible for many patients, hospital officials say.

Dr. Michael Scoppetuolo, medical director of The Cancer Center at Cooperman Barnabas, said the health network’s oncology team “is extremely high quality … everybody has significant training in oncology at major institutions.”
"I think that's something that sets us apart from other facilities in the state," he said.

Cancer care has progressed considerably as patients live longer, according to Scoppetuolo.

"We have less toxic treatments. We have better treatments," he said. "We've actually taken cancer and made it into a chronic disease as opposed to a disease where patients had very limited life expectancy."

The new center’s self-care amenities are part of a trend in cancer treatment services.

Many hospitals and other facilities now incorporate yoga, meditation and art therapy in their treatment programs.

"The psychosocial program is really woven throughout the whole program," said Angela McCabe, the director of patient and family services at Cooperman’s Cancer Center.

"We’ll have a multi-use conference room that’ll be a dedicated space for us to offer support groups, educational workshops [and] yoga classes. And in that room, we’ll have a test kitchen. Dietitians will use that kitchen space to teach classes about what to eat when a patient is coping with cancer."

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