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URMC plans to break into the top 20

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In a quest to be among the top 20 academic medical centers in the country, University of Rochester Medical Center plans to invest \$500 million over the next five to 10 years in construction, hiring and expanding research.

This strategic plan, the center's first since 1996, calls for new technology, additional facilities, more jobs, new research equipment and marketing of the medical center — including a local, 60-second TV ad during the Super Bowl that emphasizes that "medicine of the highest order" is needed to save a life or discover an elusive cure.

To come up with new and better medicines, treatments and medical devices, URMC will focus on efforts to conduct more research and to turn discoveries into usable products more quickly. University of Rochester researchers' work led to Gardasil, a vaccine intended to prevent cervical cancer, but it took many years to get from promising lab findings to a vaccine on the market.

UR is among the top 10 universities in the nation for royalty revenue from inventions it licenses to companies, taking in \$51 million in fiscal 2007. UR comprises multiple colleges and divisions, including the URMC's Strong and Highland hospitals, the School of Medicine and Dentistry, the School of Nursing, Eastman Dental Center, medical faculty practices, Visiting Nurse Service and long-term care facilities.

Already Rochester's largest employer with the equivalent of 12,700 full-time employees, URMC plans to create 771 more permanent jobs at the medical center by 2015, including more than 140 new faculty jobs ranging from \$80,000 assistant professor positions to as much as \$500,000 for a neurosurgeon.

That growth should also stimulate the creation of an estimated 1,000 additional permanent jobs in the community, according to a study by the Center for Governmental Research.

CGR also estimates that 1,400 construction jobs will be generated per year between 2008 and 2015 for three new buildings costing more than \$300 million: the renovation and expansion of Strong Memorial Hospital (announced last fall and awaiting state approval), the state-approved construction of an Ambulatory Surgery Center with 10 operating rooms in Brighton (a one-year project beginning in April) and the creation of a Clinical and Translational Sciences Building (for which Gov. Eliot Spitzer promised \$50 million this week).

"Can we afford to do this?" Dr. Bradford C. Berk, URMC chief executive, said Thursday while presenting the plans to employees. "Yes," he answered, displaying a multi-year graph showing that revenue and expenses were moving into line with each other.

Since 1996, URMC's revenue has tripled from \$600 million a year to \$1.8 billion.

Michelle Bonville, an administrator in the department of pediatrics, was in the audience of employees and was excited by the expansion plans.

"I'm coming from Kodak, so it's much more refreshing to be in an environment that's growing," she said.

The medical center's 1996 plan emphasized basic research. It called for hiring more researchers and building a four-story research center, now the Arthur Kornberg Medical Research Building at Elmwood Avenue and Lattimore Road, which already has been expanded. The research faculty has grown from 304 people in 1996 to 484 today.

The new plan to further expand research and turn basic science discoveries into marketable products will help patients, create jobs and spur the regional economy, said Berk.

URMC research will concentrate on five disease efforts — cancer, cardiovascular disease, infectious disease and immunology, musculoskeletal disease, and neuromedicine — for which its physicians also offer patient care. Officials believe that having physicians work more closely with researchers, and vice versa, will yield discoveries that can help fight disease.

That will happen most clearly in the new Wilmot Cancer Center building, which is scheduled to open in May. The first two floors are for patient care. The third floor will have computer-based researchers, such as those who design clinical trials. The fourth floor will house labs. Working in the same building should help clinicians and researchers interact more, as well as providing a daily reminder of why the research is important, said Dr. Richard Fisher, director of the Wilmot center.

Dr. Spencer Rosero, a cardiologist, already has turned one idea from his clinical experience into a 3.5-employee startup company called Physiologic Communications in Henrietta. They're trying to create an implantable device that would signal when disease changes occur at the cellular level, before symptoms appear. Patients with heart failure, for example, could appropriately adjust their medication dosage before becoming short of

breath. The device, still a decade from possible human use, would incorporate a patient's own cells, Rosero said.

In addition to the work on diseases, four URM research efforts will be aimed at spurring scientific discovery: stem cells and regenerative medicine, biomedical imaging and biomarkers, nanomedicine, and genomics and systems biology.

Since the medical center's last strategic plan in 1996, its funding from the National Institutes of Health has more than doubled from \$71 million in 1997 to \$160 million in 2007, but URM's rank in funding among research centers nationwide has stayed about the same. With money from foundations and industry, URM had a total of \$236 million in 2007.

CGR estimates total research funding for the medical center will grow by \$50 million as a result of these investments.

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