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For immediate release

U-M Health System sets its sights on new \$120M building to meet booming eye-care demands of aging population

Major expansion planned for Kellogg Eye Center clinics & vision research labs

Building will also be home to Brehm Center for Type 1 Diabetes Research & Analysis

ANN ARBOR, MI — As the American population grows older by leaps and bounds in the next 20 years, millions of people will develop the vision problems and diseases that affect the “aging eye.” Today, the University of Michigan Health System unveiled plans for a new construction project that will meet increasing demand for its advanced eye care, and provide more space for research on eye diseases and treatment.

The University Board of Regents today approved the construction of an expansion to the existing U-M Kellogg Eye Center, home to the U-M Medical School’s Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences. The \$120 million project will increase by 50 percent the space for vision research, education and patient care within the eye center, long a leader in ophthalmology.

The new facility will also provide a home for the Delores S. and William K. Brehm Center for Type 1 Diabetes Research and Analysis, which also received approval today. The center, an innovative research program with the goal of accelerating the search for a cure for Type 1 diabetes, will occupy two upper floors of the new building. The center is named for the Virginia couple who donated \$44 million to U-M in November 2004, \$30 million of which was designated for new research facilities.

When the building opens, patients will find cutting-edge clinical space and technology, a patient information center, expanded services such as genetic testing and genetic counseling, and more opportunities to participate in clinical trials. New research laboratories will allow vision scientists to build on recent advances in genetics and other fields to speed the development of new treatments.

The 215,000-square-foot building will be located immediately northwest of the current Kellogg research tower, and will replace operating rooms and eye care clinics now located in two buildings adjoining the tower. Both the current and new buildings will contain research laboratories. TSA of Massachusetts was approved today as the project’s architect.

Robert P. Kelch, M.D., U-M executive vice president for medical affairs and CEO of the U-M Health System, notes that the new building project is the first one proposed since UMHS formulated its master plan for growth.

“The Wall Street area, where the eye center is located, is just across the Huron River from the main hospital and research complex, and is one of the areas we’ve targeted for new facilities to serve our patients and give our scientists the room they need to discover and interact across disciplines,” he says. “Having vision and diabetes researchers in the same building may also foster cross-disciplinary interactions that lead to new discoveries.”

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Kelch, a pediatric endocrinologist who has treated many children with Type 1 diabetes, notes that diabetic eye disease is a major complication of diabetes and is one of the leading causes of blindness, affecting over 4 million Americans.

Funding for construction of the new center will rely in part on future gifts made by donors through the university-wide Michigan Difference campaign. In addition to the Brehm gift, and \$10 million in donations already raised by the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, the building will also be partially funded by resources from the U-M Hospitals and Health Centers.

Paul R. Lichter, M.D., chair of the department and director of the Kellogg Eye Center, says the new facility will be equipped with the latest in technology to treat, cure and prevent blinding eye disease. “The expanded eye center will allow us to increase the pace of research toward a cure for diseases like macular degeneration that diminish the vision of older Americans just as they reach the golden years of life,” he says. “It will also allow us to care for an expanding patient base, educate future scientists and clinicians, and bring outstanding eye care and research to our community.”

Adds Bill Brehm, “Dee and I are thrilled to see our vision take physical form so quickly. We see the Brehm Center’s portion of this building as a hub of activity that will shape a new paradigm for research, using advanced Systems-Analysis and Medical Informatics techniques to accelerate the search for a cure for Type 1 diabetes. We look forward to participating as plans for the building continue.”

To address the needs of patients and local residents, the long-term master plan for the area includes several points of access to the City of Ann Arbor’s nearby Riverside Park, as well as bike paths, pedestrian walkways, transit centers, and additional parking for patients and staff.

Dr. Lichter served as chair of the Department when the current Kellogg Eye Center “tower” was built in 1985. At that time, the goal of the new center was to bring together in one location the ophthalmic clinicians and researchers who were scattered throughout the medical campus. Now, he observes, the new facility will allow the growth that is the key to achieving a new level of excellence.

“We are considered one of the top eye departments in the country as it is now,” says Dr. Lichter. “With this new facility and the recruitment of additional clinicians, scientists and educators, we expect our department to be in the very forefront — not only of departments of ophthalmology, research, and vision science in this country — but in the world.”

Patient visits to the Kellogg Eye Center have more than tripled in the last 20 years, from 36,852 in 1985 to 127,189 in 2005. That growth represents an increase of 8 to 10 percent each year. The number of eye surgeries at the center have also tripled over two decades, with just over 5,800 procedures performed this year, making it one of the busiest surgical eye centers in the U.S.

The growth in patient volume is further magnified by a shift in demographics. The much talked-about baby boom generation is now approaching retirement age, and its members will begin to experience eye disorders common among the over-60 population.

While the Kellogg Eye Center also has a thriving pediatric ophthalmology clinic, 57 percent of its patients are over the age of 60. And this older segment of the population is growing rapidly. By 2025, the number of Michigan residents over the age of 65 will increase by 52 percent.

A nationwide study also suggests that as the population grows older, the incidence of eye disease will increase as well. The National Eye Institute reported in 2002 that 3.3 million Americans age 40 and over were affected by low vision or blindness. That figure is expected to reach 5.5 million by the year 2020. The study also identified four disorders as most common among those 40 and over: age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy.

Advances in vision research

Advances in genetics have altered all fields of medicine — ophthalmology chief among them. The U-M's ophthalmology research scientists are national leaders in identifying genes related to eye diseases such as AMD, retinitis pigmentosa, and glaucoma. The Kellogg Eye Center is one of the first in the U.S. to have a federally certified laboratory to provide genetic testing for eye disease.

U-M vision researchers have had success in other areas as well: applying ultrafast laser technology to eye surgery, developing new molecular tools for detecting eye disease, and creating high-speed imaging systems to examine cellular communication, an advance that has implications not just for eye disease, but for many other diseases.

As other measures of success, the department ranks 6th in the nation among departments of ophthalmology in funding from the National Eye Institute and has been ranked as the 6th "Best Overall" program by *Ophthalmology Times*.

Research-oriented programs to be created or expanded in the new center include a genetic testing laboratory; genetic counseling services; clinical trials space; a translational research center; and research centers for retinal and macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and vascular disease, glaucoma, corneal disease and children's eye disease, as well as new applications of ultrafast lasers for eye surgery.

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