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Northern Illinois Proton Center delayed by tough economic conditions

Center vows to work with state health board to continue project

WEST CHICAGO, IL- The Northern Illinois Proton Treatment and Research Center (NIPTRC) today announced the approaching conclusion of NIPTRC's two year certificate of exemption from the state's health facilities board will necessitate a re-appearance before a newly-created Health Facilities and Services Review Board (HFSRB) for a new approval process. The \$159 million state-of-the-art facility, already under construction, will provide much needed treatment for certain pediatric and difficult-to-treat adult cancers as well as advance the field of proton therapy through innovative research and development.

"I am disappointed to report that we have not completed the project in the timeframe required by the state's regulatory guidelines," said Cheryl Murer, Chair of the NIPTRC Board of Directors.

"However, our passion still burns brightly and will not be extinguished in our quest to bring this high technology approach to fighting cancer to the state of Illinois. This project is of vital importance and we know it is destined to become a crown jewel of the state's scientific, research and medical treatment facilities."

NIPTRC's certificate of exemption from the state's regulatory agency within the Department of Public Health ends on February 26. The Illinois General Assembly recently passed legislation creating a nine member HFSRB replacing the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board (IHFPB). NIPTRC will begin a new regulatory process for the medical component of the project.

"We will follow the state's new regulatory process that will require us to file a certificate of need application," said Murer. "Our need to re-approach the Board comes as a result of the very unique challenges NIPTRC faces in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. NIPTRC is not alone, as many construction projects across the country relying on tax-exempt bonds encountered significant delays. Nevertheless, we are eager to work with the state board, so that we can complete the project."

In the meantime, NIPTRC continues to reduce the project's budget and enhance its appeal to the capital markets. NIPTRC's partners include physicians from the Northwestern Medical Faculty Foundation who will provide clinical and educational services to patients; researchers from NIU,

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Fermilab and Argonne National Lab who will lead research teams and projects that advance the field of proton therapy; JP Morgan; DuPage Airport Authority; CenterPoint Properties; and Pepper Construction.

NIPTRC officials report that significant resources have already been expended on the project. All preliminary utility and foundation work has been completed on the center. Massive earth moving and excavation has already taken place, and pylons have been drilled 60 feet into the ground to support 12 foot thick concrete walls. The 90 ton cyclotron used in the treatment of patients is well under construction, although no formal contract will be signed until all regulatory requirements are met.

Additionally, scientists and researchers from NIPTRC and Northern Illinois University are already developing a new innovation that they believe will be a major medical breakthrough in the delivery of proton beam therapy for cancer patients. NIPTRC's research bears witness to its vital mission of advancement in cancer treatment that will set it apart from other proton treatment centers.

"NIU is working with NIPTRC on several very important research and education initiatives," said NIU Provost Dr. Ray Alden. "We are in the process of determining the next steps of our partnership but believe multiple academic disciplines, including our programs in sciences, health sciences, engineering, business, law, and education, greatly enhance NIPTRC's research and technical training capabilities and help put the center in a class of its own."

NIPTRC's unique mission distinguishes itself from every other proton center in several notable ways. Cancer therapy and treatment will take place in a holistic environment which treats the whole patient and their family in a caring and compassionate way. Patients will receive services that include nutrition, speech pathology, physical therapy, and family counseling as well as educational tutoring for pediatric patients. NIPTRC is also committed to investing the proceeds from cancer treatment in advancing the treatment of patients and furthering research and education as a not-for-profit entity. Furthermore, NIPTRC is committed to providing charity care.

"This facility will be a catalyst that can open new doors to propel us to higher levels of advanced cancer treatment and research and will be unlike any other in the country," said Murer. "Although we want to provide this treatment option as soon as possible, we also want to ensure we build the absolute best, most comprehensive and holistic proton center in the world. In cooperation with our partners, we are well on our way to achieving this goal."

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