

Expansion to accommodate upgrades at cancer institute New radiation machine to be better at targeting tumors

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By BRIAN PERRY - City Editor (citydesk@mauinews.com) , The Maui News

WAILUKU - The Pacific Cancer Institute of Maui is undertaking a nearly \$7 million expansion and renovation project, primarily to accommodate a new, \$3 million machine for radiation surgery and therapy.

The institute is expecting to get a building permit from Maui County this week for its 2,500-square-foot expansion into the driveway area at Maui Memorial Medical Center, said Dr. Bobby Baker, a radiation oncologist and founder of the institute. Plans also call for increasing the number of patient examination rooms from three to five and doctors' offices from two to four.

The new machine, a TrueBeam STx system, requires construction of a concrete vault measuring 42-by-42 feet in length and width and nearly 18 feet high, Baker said. It will need some 8-foot-thick walls to protect those outside from radiation.

Once the vault is completed, it will take about three months to install and calibrate the machine, he said.

The new machine will allow physicians to treat what Baker calls "moving targets," such as small lung tumors, although it can treat any organ in the body. The machine is able to monitor movement in the patient, including breathing, and treat new areas of tumors, he said.

The machine delivers a concentrated amount of radiation to a cancerous organ, causing a breakdown in the DNA of cancer cells, preventing them from replicating.

Baker said he thinks the machine will be the first of its kind in Hawaii. The new equipment already has been approved by the state Department of Health to replace the institute's current radiation therapy machine, which has been at the facility since it opened in September 1994.

That piece of equipment has "served us very well," Baker said. But "it can only last so long."



*Lead radiation therapist Steven Morando (right) prepares for a patient to be treated with the linear accelerator as Dr. Bobby Baker looks on Tuesday. The accelerator is to be replaced with a new machine housed in a new wing of the institute.
The Maui News / MATTHEW THAYER photo*

The institute faced the logistical problem - without expansion - of removing the existing equipment from its vault and putting in the new equipment, which would have taken about six months and required closing the institute for that period, he said.

“We’re currently treating 35 patients every day,” Baker said. “Closing would be a disaster for all of Maui.”

Institute officials considered putting the new equipment at a facility on Hookele Street in Kahului, he said. But that would have required transporting hospital patients, in an ambulance, to that location.

Baker said he talked with Maui Memorial administration officials and decided it would be better for the overall community to stay at the same location at the hospital, expanding into the driveway circle near the emergency room.

“There’s not a lot of room,” he said. “We’ll use every square inch.”

Since opening 17 years ago, the institute has treated more than 5,000 patients, Baker said.

This will be the last major piece of equipment Baker will oversee installed at the institute, he said.

“It will be my swan song,” he added.

Baker said the project will begin after final paperwork on a lease for use of additional hospital property is complete.

“That’s the last thing we need to get shovels in the ground,” he said.

Maui Memorial officials have been “very cooperative,” he said, working to assemble a team to ensure that the construction project goes smoothly with as little impact as possible.

Arita/Poulson is the project’s general contractor, Baker said. The contractor built the original cancer center and has done other construction projects at the hospital.

“They understand how to minimize the impact” of construction, he said.



Pacific Cancer Institute of Maui founder Dr. Bobby Baker goes over expansion plans with Linda Wilson, director of medical oncology, on Tuesday afternoon in his Wailuku office. The Maui News / MATTHEW THAYER photo