

Jan. 30, 2018

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Construction begins on state's first proton therapy center

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – [Proton International](#), in conjunction with the [University of Alabama at Birmingham](#), has broken ground on the first proton therapy facility in the state. The facility, Proton International at UAB, is expected to be ready to treat cancer patients in 2020.

“Establishing the first proton therapy facility in Alabama is one more way that UAB Medicine is improving health care for the residents of our state and region,” said Will Ferniany, Ph.D., CEO of the [UAB Health System](#). “This advanced cancer-fighting radiation technology, coupled with the skill, experience and resources of Proton International, the UAB [Department of Radiation Oncology](#), [School of Medicine](#) and the [Comprehensive Cancer Center](#), will be a life-changing resource for cancer patients throughout our region.”

Proton therapy uses highly precise proton beams instead of traditional X-rays to attack tumors. It is available at only 25 locations in the United States, most associated with academic medical centers. The therapy delivers a more precise dose of radiation to a tumor and can avoid damage to healthy surrounding tissue better than conventional X-ray radiation.

Proton International at UAB, on 20th Street South between Fourth and Fifth avenues, will consist of a three-story building to house the proton therapy system, manufactured by [Varian Medical Systems](#), a longtime partner with UAB in the delivery of radiation therapy. UAB will lease the property to Proton International, which will build and manage the facility.

Proton International is a leader in the field of proton therapy. The UAB center will be its fourth project in the United States, with two already treating patients and one under construction. The company also has two centers in Europe underway.

“Proton therapy has proved itself as a front-line treatment for multiple forms of cancer,” said Chris Chandler, CEO of Proton International. “Experts conservatively estimate that about 250,000 cancer patients in the United States alone could benefit from proton therapy. We are excited to partner with UAB and the Department of Radiation Oncology to put this outstanding tool into the hands of the best oncologists in Alabama.”

Planning and pre-treatment will continue to be done at UAB's Hazelrig-Salter Radiation Oncology Center. The medical staff, including radiation oncologists, cancer physicians, medical

physicists, dosimetrists, radiation therapy technologists and nurses, will be exclusively from UAB.

“Proton therapy will allow us to treat deep-seeded cancers and minimize the radiation dose delivered to surrounding normal structures,” said James A. Bonner, M.D., the Merle M. Salter Endowed Professor and chair of the UAB [Department of Radiation Oncology](#). “It can be particularly efficacious in the treatment of children, who are particularly sensitive to the effects of radiation therapy. Because of its precision, proton therapy greatly reduces damage to nearby healthy tissue, which is the cause of most short- and long-term side effects, including cancer recurrence later in life.”

Proton therapy is used to treat tumors of the brain and central nervous system, spine, head and neck, lung, prostate, liver, gastrointestinal tract and colon, and some breast tumors. While it treats primarily single-site tumors, it can, in some cases, be used for treating cancer that has spread, or metastasized, to surrounding tissue because of its focused dose capabilities.

[Brasfield & Gorrie](#) is general contractor for the project, and [Stantec](#) is the architectural firm. Milestones in the construction of the facility include the topping out, expected to take place around August 2018, and the installation of the cyclotron and other major equipment in early 2019. The first patients should be treated in early 2020.

UAB will also be involved in clinical research studies on the use of proton therapy, to discover the full utility of the therapy and produce best practice parameters on its use.

About UAB

Known for its innovative and interdisciplinary approach to education at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, the University of Alabama at Birmingham is the state of Alabama’s largest employer and an internationally renowned research university and academic medical center; its professional schools and specialty patient-care programs are consistently ranked among the nation’s top 50. Find more information at www.uab.edu and www.uabmedicine.org.

About Proton International

Proton International, www.protonintl.com, has an experienced team dedicated to bringing proton therapy to patients. The company works with hospitals and physician groups to develop one- and two-room proton therapy facilities on a turnkey basis. The PI team has developed and operated multiple centers and is currently active on several projects.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The University of Alabama at Birmingham is a separate, independent institution from the University of Alabama, which is located in Tuscaloosa. Please use **University of Alabama at Birmingham** on first reference and **UAB** on subsequent references.

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