The Quest for NCI Designation
A report on our accomplishments
The University of Kansas Cancer Center submits its application for National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation in September 2011. The application is possible only through unprecedented support from individuals, businesses and communities throughout the region.
Background

The University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC) has been working to eliminate the burden of cancer for decades. Its cancer program was started in 1969, with its first American Cancer Society Professor of Clinical Oncology and support from the Kansas Masonic Foundation. In the early 1970s, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) awarded KUMC funding to investigate the feasibility of establishing a clinical cancer research center in Kansas. By the 1990s, the cancer center was experiencing steady growth in research funding and discoveries.

Since 2002, it has been KUMC’s goal to achieve NCI Cancer Center designation, the gold standard for cancer institutes across the country. NCI-designated Cancer Centers are recognized for their scientific excellence and are awarded federal funding through a rigorous peer review process. They are a major source of discovery and development of more effective approaches to cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment. NCI Cancer Centers also educate health care professionals and deliver medical advances to patients and their families.

In 2004, KUMC renamed its cancer research organization the Kansas Masonic Cancer Research Institute, reflecting a commitment of $20 million by the Kansas Masonic Foundation to support cancer research on the KUMC campus. The gift allowed KUMC to recruit the cancer center’s first full-time director, Roy A. Jensen, MD, a nationally recognized breast cancer researcher and pathologist from the NCI-designated Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center.

In 2005, attaining NCI designation was named KU’s top research priority. Since then, The University of Kansas Cancer Center has become a leader in research and patient care, while generating significant economic development. This report focuses on highlights in the quest to attain NCI designation.
2006

- The Kansas Legislature approves a $5 million appropriation for the cancer center beginning in fiscal year 2007. The legislature has continued this appropriation each year.

- The cancer center establishes the Drug Discovery, Delivery & Experimental Therapeutic program (D3ET). D3ET leverages world-class cancer biology research at KU, KUMC and the Stowers Institute for Medical Research with the strengths of the medicinal and pharmaceutical chemistry research at the nationally ranked KU School of Pharmacy. Scott Weir, PharmD, PhD, a 25-year veteran of companies such as Marion Laboratories, Hoechst Marion Roussel and Aventis Pharmaceuticals, arrives to lead the program.

- D3ET program leader Valentino Stella, PhD, a professor of medicinal chemistry at KU, has a longstanding contract with NCI to conduct research on promising drug therapies. Under Dr. Stella’s contract, eight of the 17 NCI cancer drug therapies advancing to clinical trials have been formulated at KU.

- The American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association award KUMC $1.2 million to recruit American Indian smokers and examine the effectiveness of culturally sensitive smoking-cessation programs that respect tobacco’s role in American Indian traditions.

2007

- KUMC launches the Midwest Cancer Alliance, a regional network of health care and research organizations focused on enhancing research collaborations and increasing access to clinical trials and other cancer care resources. By 2011, members include Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, Kansas Bioscience Authority, Kansas State University, Stowers Institute for Medical Research, Stormont-Vail HealthCare, Truman Medical Centers, The University of Kansas Hospital, Goodland Regional Medical Center, Hays Medical Center, Promise Regional Medical Center in Hutchinson, Salina Regional Health Center, St. Francis Health Center, Saint Luke’s Health System, and Via Christi Hospital in Pittsburg.

“I returned to Kansas to be a part of a very big dream: to create a truly world-class cancer center. I do not intend to rest until that dream becomes a reality.”

Roy A. Jensen, MD
Director, The University of Kansas Cancer Center
• Kansas Sen. Barbara Allen (R-Overland Park), a breast cancer survivor, leads efforts to pass legislation creating a “Driven to Cure” license plate. For every plate sold, $50 is contributed to The University of Kansas Cancer Center for research and outreach.

• The University of Kansas Hospital and the Kansas City Cancer Center combine blood and marrow transplant services. This establishes the area’s largest blood and marrow transplant (BMT) program, providing lifesaving treatments for patients with leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma and other related blood diseases.

• The University of Kansas Hospital’s outpatient Cancer Center and Medical Pavilion, the largest outpatient center in the region, opens at the former Sprint headquarters in Westwood. Designed to deliver advanced medical care and the best patient experiences, the 55,000-square-foot facility is a response to significant patient volume growth. New cancer case volume has grown 75 percent since 2001 to more than 1,800 new cancer patients in 2007.

• After touring the new outpatient Cancer Center and Medical Pavilion, philanthropist and civic leader Annette Bloch announces a $1 million gift to support patient care.

• With a gift from Back in the Swing, a Kansas City-based not-for-profit organization, the Breast Cancer Survivorship Center opens in the Westwood facility. It is the region’s first such center, incorporating clinical, research and psychosocial programs to serve the needs of breast cancer survivors and provide a model that can be expanded to other cancer types.

2008

• The NCI invites KU to apply for cancer center designation on September 25, 2011.

• The University of Kansas Cancer Center opens a Phase I clinical trial using a new ovarian cancer drug developed by KU researchers. The drug, Nanotax, is the reformulation of a commonly used chemotherapy drug, Paclitaxel. Negative side effects associated with Paclitaxel are attributed to the solvent that it is mixed with in order to be administered to patients. KU researchers believe Nanotax will be a less-toxic, more effective treatment.

• At the urging of The University of Kansas Cancer Center and other advocacy organizations, state policymakers remove barriers for cancer patients in clinical trials, preserving insurance coverage for routine medical services.

• In what is believed to be the largest individual gift ever made to a hospital in the Kansas City area or the state of Kansas, Annette Bloch donates $20 million to The University of Kansas Hospital cancer services. The hospital renames its Westwood outpatient cancer facility the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Care Pavilion. The Blochs’ names also appear on the radiation oncology building on KU Medical Center’s main campus.

• Cheryl Jernigan, chair of the Advancement Board for KU Medical Center, The University of Kansas Hospital and The University of Kansas Physicians, is selected to join the NCI Director’s Consumer Liaison Group. Jernigan is one of four new members chosen from 75 applicants. Her role is to advise the NCI from a cancer patient’s perspective.

• Voters in Johnson County, Kan., pass a 1/8-cent sales tax for the Johnson County Education and Research Triangle (JCERT). Revenue will help fund the KU Clinical Research Center, site of early phase clinical trials for cancer and other new therapies.

• The cancer center establishes the Midwest Cancer Alliance Partners Advisory Board, a group of CEOs from health care and research organizations. The board serves in an advisory role to the cancer center director and works to move the NCI designation effort forward.
2009

- The Institute for Advancing Medical Innovation (IAMI) is formed with an $8.1 million grant from the Kauffman Foundation, matched by KU Endowment. Led by Dr. Weir, who is also the leader of the cancer center’s D3ET program, IAMI’s mission is to streamline the development and delivery of drugs and biomedical devices.

- KU and Kansas State University meet in the governor’s office to sign a Memorandum of Understanding formalizing their commitment to collaborate on working toward NCI designation.

- The Kansas Bioscience Authority (KBA) awards more than $29 million for state-of-the-art cancer research space and to recruit cancer-related Eminent Scholars (researchers who are nationally recognized for their scientific achievements and entrepreneurial spirits to enhance innovative research that leads to economic gains) and Rising Star Scholars (world-class bioscience scholars with proven records of grant productivity, team leadership in a research environment and an interest in applying research to commercial opportunities to build Kansas’ bioscience economy). In part, the KBA investment will support 10 years of bond payments for construction to renovate the Wahl/Hixon Research Complex, estimated to cost $53 million.

- Construction begins on the Wahl/Hixon Research Complex, renovating 170,000 square feet on the KU Medical Center campus to house 37 cancer-focused researchers.

- The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society names The University of Kansas Cancer Center a national academic partner through the Therapy Acceleration Program (TAP). TAP supports private-sector and academic-based projects to move blood cancer treatments into the development pipeline and closer to commercialization.

- KU orthopedic surgeons are the first in the country to perform targeted muscle reinnervation on a cancer patient.

- After two years of extraordinary growth in its blood and marrow transplant program, The University of Kansas Hospital opens a 7,500-square-foot facility for the BMT program at the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Care Pavilion in Westwood. The program has grown by 92 percent from 2006 to 2007 and another 53 percent in 2008.

- KU Endowment and The University of Kansas Cancer Center announce a fundraising initiative to support the NCI-designation effort. The Advancement Board, formed in 2005 to develop community and political support and to bolster fundraising efforts for education, research and patient care at the academic medical center, launches the Cancer Funding Partners. This volunteer-led effort to foster civic, business and community support begins with a $1 million gift from the Sunderland Foundation.

- Urology Times, a leading medical magazine and the most widely circulated publication among urologists nationwide, names the prostate cancer program at The University of Kansas Cancer Center one of 13 “Clinical Centers of Excellence” in the country. It is the only prostate cancer program in the state of Kansas or the Kansas City metropolitan area to receive the honor.

- The Breast Center is selected as one of just 12 sites nationally for a major clinical research study sponsored by U-Systems, Inc., the developer of a 3D ultrasound breast imaging system, to determine whether 3D automated breast ultrasound, combined with routine screening mammography, is more accurate in detecting breast cancer in women with dense breast tissue than the routine screening mammogram alone.

- KU Endowment announces that a $10 million gift from Joe and Jean Brandmeyer will create an endowed chair of Radiation Oncology and support patient care and research priorities needed to achieve NCI designation. The cancer center recruits Parvesh Kumar, MD, who is internationally known for his work in lung cancer, head and neck tumors and prostate cancer, from the University of Southern California’s Keck School of Medicine to serve as the Joe and Jean Brandmeyer Chair and Professor of Radiation Oncology.
2010

- The Hall Family Foundation of Kansas City commits $18 million to help recruit world-class scientists and fund a Phase I clinical trials facility in Fairway. The foundation purchased the facility in 2008 and is donating it to the cancer center. The foundation’s gift brings total private contributions for NCI designation to $37 million.

- After only 13 months, a team of researchers at The University of Kansas Cancer Center, the Ontario Cancer Institute, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and Beckloff Associates advance a promising new therapy for leukemia into a Phase I clinical trial. The researchers have discovered that an antifungal cream could be reformulated to disrupt molecules in the body that are significant in the growth of leukemia.

- Supported by a $1 million donation from the Burns & McDonnell Foundation, the Prostate Cancer High-Risk Prevention Program opens. It will help high-risk patients focus on ways to decrease their risk of developing cancer and help patients who have had prostate cancer learn ways to decrease their risk of recurrence.

- The cancer center joins the Friends of Cancer Research, the Kauffman Foundation, the Kansas Bioscience Authority and the Council for American Medical Innovation to host a national town hall meeting on the new role of academia in drug development and discovery. More than 200 thought leaders from industry, academia, government and philanthropic organizations attend. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius gives the keynote speech, and National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, and Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, MD, lead a panel on how to speed drugs from bench to bedside. KU’s model is among the examples of how this process can be accelerated.
• Shrikant Anant, PhD, a pioneering biologist with a national reputation in gastrointestinal cancer research, renowned for discovering a gene that causes normal cells to turn into cancer cells, arrives from the University of Oklahoma Cancer Institute to become Associate Director of Cancer Prevention and Control. He is a KBA Eminent Scholar.

• Kapil Bhalla, MD, an internationally recognized leader and physician scientist in the field of cancer biology and targeted drug therapy, is recruited from the Medical College of Georgia Cancer Center to serve as Deputy Director at the University of Kansas Cancer Center. He is a KBA Eminent Scholar.

• Susan G. Komen for the Cure awards a $4.5 million Promise Grant to Carol Fabian, MD, a leader in breast cancer prevention research, to investigate whether an estrogen found in flax seed – a commonly used supplement – can reduce the risk for breast cancer.

• The NIH awards KU researchers $12 million to improve prevention and the chances of surviving cancer for rural, Latino and American Indian communities in Kansas. In the scientific community, these awards are known as the prestigious "U54" (a grant encompassing biological, biomedical, behavioral, social science, demographic and/or epidemiological research) and "P20" (for institutions with relatively new research programs).

• Success rates soar for blood and marrow transplant patients as the BMT program performs 179 transplants, eclipsing the prior year's record of 164. The program is also designated to serve as a National Marrow Donor Program-approved collection center. It is the only program in Kansas with this distinction, which belongs to just 96 centers nationwide.

• Andrew K. Godwin, PhD, an internationally recognized leader in the field of translational research and personalized medicine, arrives from Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia – one of the country's first NCI-designated centers – to serve as Associate Director of Translational Research. He is a KBA Eminent Scholar – and a native of Lawrence, Kan.

• Clinical programs extend care to 2,197 new cancer patients and place 296 patients on therapeutic clinical trials, representing more than 13 percent of these new patients – exceeding the 10 percent benchmark expectation for NCI-designated centers.

• Patients make more than 88,000 visits to the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Care Pavilion in Westwood this fiscal year.

• Missys' Boutique opens in the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Care Pavilion, providing a salon area for wig fitting, a private room for fitting prostheses and mastectomy garments and an array of jewelry, scarves, hats, skin-care products and gifts. It is named in memory of Melissa Malter Newell and Ann Wilcox O'Neill (both known as Missy), two women who lost battles with breast cancer after eliciting promises from family members to help other cancer patients. The boutique is funded entirely through charitable contributions from corporations and individuals, including staff at The University of Kansas Hospital.
2011

• The University of Kansas Cancer Center and the Kansas City Cancer Center merge to create the area’s premier outpatient cancer care organization, with more than 50 medical and radiation oncologists working in 12 locations throughout the metropolitan area and a combined total of 216 therapeutic clinical trials.

• Danny Welch, PhD, a leading expert on tumor progression, arrives from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he was director of the National Foundation for Cancer Research Center for Cancer Metastasis Research. He will serve as the cancer center’s Associate Director of Basic Science. He is a KBA Eminent Scholar.

• The University of Kansas Cancer Center’s first patient outcomes report documents excellent patient survival rates. Actual survival rates at the cancer center exceed the average expected survival rates. Breast cancer, lung cancer and renal cancer meet or exceed the combined rates of other leading academic centers in the country.

• The cancer center joins with the NIH and the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society to form The Learning Collaborative, an effort to discover and develop new drug therapies for rare blood cancers. Among their projects is Auranofin, which repurposes an arthritis drug used to treat chronic lymphocytic leukemia and is now in a clinical trial at Ohio State University, the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and KU. The Learning Collaborative establishes a cooperative research and development agreement (CRADA), giving KU and LLS the responsibility to further advance the Auranofin project. The CRADA is the first agreement executed between the NIH and non-profit partners.

• Raymond Perez, MD, an expert in early phase clinical trials, arrives from Dartmouth’s NCI-designated Norris Cotton Cancer Center to direct The University of Kansas Cancer Center’s Phase I clinical trials program. He is a KBA Rising Star.

• KU Endowment announces that, thanks to the generosity of hundreds of donors, the $61 million needed to fund the cancer center’s NCI priorities has been raised ahead of the September 25 application deadline.

• The KBA has committed more than $50 million to the NCI designation effort, allowing the university to invest in basic research, clinical trials, technology, faculty recruitment and major construction of state-of-the-art laboratories. KU has matched each KBA dollar, bringing the combined total to more than $100 million.

• The University of Kansas Hospital’s cancer program is named one of the nation’s best in U.S. News & World Report’s Best Hospitals 2011-12. Rankings are based on measurable achievements in quality, patient safety, nursing excellence and other best patient care indicators.

• The KU Center for Telemedicine and Telehealth, the longest-running program of its kind in the United States, has provided more than 2,196 teleoncology consults since 2006. This televideo technology also provides educational opportunities for health professionals to learn about the latest technologies, treatments and services.

• The Midwest Cancer Alliance has collaborated with member hospitals to hold community events across the state. More than 10,000 individuals have been screened for cancer or received educational tools.

• The University of Kansas Cancer Center receives special commendation from the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer, a national accrediting body. Fewer than half of organizations that apply receive full accreditation. This is the cancer center’s third consecutive three-year accreditation.

• Since its inception in January 2009, the Institute for Advancing Medical Innovation (IAMI) has collaborated with industry, academia, government and disease philanthropy organizations to advance seven new cancer drug therapies to clinical trials.
Kansas City’s four highly competitive television network affiliates join together to simulcast a special, locally produced program, Be Part of the Cure™, to support The University of Kansas Cancer Center’s drive for NCI designation.

The University of Kansas Cancer Center submits its application for NCI designation.

Approximately 1,800 employees, including faculty, research support, clinical and administrative staff, are specifically devoted to cancer care and research activities. We estimate that since 2006, the NCI designation pursuit has created 1,123 jobs and had a regional economic impact of $453 million.

The University of Kansas Clinical Research Center, a 77,000-square-foot facility funded through the Hall Family Foundation of Kansas City and the JCERT tax, will open in Fairway in early 2012. Patients in the region will have greatly expanded access to promising Phase I clinical trials.

Peer reviewers from the NCI will visit our site on February 22, 2012. We expect to learn whether we have been awarded NCI designation by early summer 2012.