

SickKids breaks ground on new research tower

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The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) took a big step forward in the advancement of pediatric medicine on Tuesday, May 4 when ground was broken on a new research site.

SickKids' 21-storey Research and Learning Tower, which will be built on the northwest corner of Bay and Elm streets downtown, will feature integrated facilities, allowing researchers and scientists to work together more closely toward breakthroughs in treatment and care.

SickKids is already a leader in researching illnesses and chronic conditions affecting children, but the new facility, designed solely for that purpose, will allow for more concentrated learning and study near the hospital's main site.

With a 25-seat auditorium, tele-education facilities, learning labs and common atrium areas, the tower will provide better opportunities for collaboration among researchers.

SickKids president and CEO Mary Jo Haddad said the building was a long-time coming.

"We've been planning and dreaming about this building for a very, very long time," she said. "When the tower opens in 2013, (the research aspect of SickKids) will finally have a public face."

The 750,000 square foot building will offer space for some 2,000 scientists and technologists, who will continue a long-standing tradition of research at the hospital. The hospital began its research arm in 1918 with a nutrition program, and SickKids researchers have made countless breakthroughs in the years since.

SickKids research has helped countless children and youth, such as 17-year-old Brandon Gibson, a cystic fibrosis patient who attended the groundbreaking of the new research facility.

"Without the discovery SickKids made for me, I wouldn't have been able to get a lung transplant in 2006," he said.

SickKids chief of research Dr. Janet Rossant said the new facility will make a definite difference in the efficiency of the hospital's research by bringing about creative collaborations through which scientists will be able to find new treatments and improve care.

"Right now, we have researchers in six buildings across seven city blocks," she said. "You've got to have linkage where they can bring their ideas together."

The tower will focus on several areas of health care, including brain and behaviour, cancer, stem cells and regenerative medicine, molecular science and lung biology.

By bringing the researchers together, it will also enable SickKids to cut costs and free up more space in its existing buildings for patient care.

"Right now, we lease a lot of space, so we'll save money on leases, and we have some areas in the hospital that isn't the best research space," Rossant said. "This is part of the master planning process for the hospital to help get the most out of our space."

More than half the required funding has already been raised for the \$400 million Research and Learning Tower. Two hundred million dollars will be covered by a bond, which will be paid off by the SickKids Foundation and the Canada Foundation for Innovation has contributed \$75 million toward the cost.

The SickKids Foundation launched a \$200 million fundraising campaign at the groundbreaking ceremony to help cover construction costs and set up an endowment fund to cover operating costs.

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