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### Lincoln County Cancer Center Proposed

CaroMont Health, as the parent company of Gaston Memorial Hospital (GMH), and Radiation Oncology Centers of the Carolinas, Inc. (ROCC) have announced plans to build and operate a radiation oncology treatment center in Lincolnton through a joint venture named Lincoln Radiation Oncology Associates (LROA).

Radiation oncology services are generally provided through equipment called linear accelerators, which are used to treat many types of cancer. Due to the expense of such technology, North Carolina requires state review and approval of such projects.

Since radiation oncology treatments are not offered in Lincoln County, patients undergoing such care must now travel to outlying treatment centers in Catawba, Gaston, Iredell and Mecklenburg counties, potentially traveling hundreds or even thousands of miles during an extended course of treatment. As reported in Hospital/Freestanding Facility License Renewal Application Patient Origin Data, Lincoln County patients receive their radiation oncology care at facilities located in several counties, though almost 77% receive their care at GMH.

Lincoln County is part of the four county, Linear Accelerator Service Area 6, which also includes Cleveland, Gaston and Rutherford counties. While the Cleveland and Rutherford county facilities each have a single linear accelerator, Gaston County has three such units located at GMH.

While the 2008 State Medical Facilities Plan indicates no need for any new linear accelerator equipment within Linear Accelerator Service Area 6, it is possible under existing regulations to relocate such equipment within a service area. This can be done through a non-competitive certificate of need (CON) application, though only the existing service providers may apply.

To generate sufficient need for a new linear accelerator CON competition, both the service area population and the number of radiation therapy procedures performed would have to increase markedly. For example, the current service area population would have to grow by about 214,000, almost 50%, though the recent annual growth rate has been 1.1%.

Similarly, the number of radiation therapy procedures performed would have to grow by 51%.

Dr. Dave Huber, VP for Medical Services at GMH noted, “With so many Lincoln County patients coming to Gastonia for their radiation oncology care, we felt it was the ‘right thing to do’, by moving one of our linear accelerators to Lincolnton, to cut the drive time, expense and other inconveniences faced by our patients and their family members. This should help CMC-Lincoln in its efforts to build a cancer program.”

The proposed center has generated over 300 letters of support, including those from 75 physicians, such as Dr. Margo Aswad, Chief of Staff at CMC-Lincoln. Along with state senator James Forrester, M.D., state representative Joe Kiser and other elected officials, support has been offered by staff with Relay for Life, American Cancer Society, hospice agencies, United Way, senior services agencies and many Lincoln County patients and care givers. Others interested in supporting this effort by filing a letter of support may access sample letters at [www.rocc.net](http://www.rocc.net).

Upon approval by state regulators, the proposed \$6.0 million center will be located near the new CMC-Lincoln hospital, and could be operational by October, 2011. Physician staffing will be provided by Southeast Radiation Oncology Group, P.A. (SERO), which provides similar coverage at thirteen locations in the Carolinas. Other staffing and day-to-day management of the new facility will be provided by GMH.

GMH is accredited by the American College of Surgeons as a community comprehensive cancer program, the closest such program for the majority of Lincoln County residents. First accredited in 1990, the GMH program has been reaccredited every three years since, and recently received the Commission on Cancer Outstanding Achievement Award. ROCC owns three freestanding radiation oncology treatment centers, which are all accredited by the American College of Radiation Oncology.

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