

ORAL REMARKS – PUBLIC HEARING ON JULY 26,2023

RE: LINAC NEED DETERMINATION FOR SERVICE AREA 17 – FIRSTHEALTH CANCER CENTER

PRESENTED BY STEPHEN KING, M.D.

Hello –

My name is Stephen King. I am a radiation oncology physician and medical director of the radiation oncology department in the Cancer Center of FirstHealth Moore Regional Hospital in Pinehurst. I am speaking today to explain our need for an additional linear accelerator.

Linear accelerators, or linacs, are complicated treatment machines used to deliver radiation treatments for cancer patients. Most cancer patients require radiation treatments at some time during their cancer care, and delivering effective radiation treatments requires coordination of a large team in the Radiation Department. This team includes specially trained radiation therapists, medical physicist and dosimetrist, specialty nurses, and specialized radiation oncology physicians.

Furthermore, high quality modern cancer care almost always requires combinations of treatments including surgery, chemotherapy and immunotherapy, and radiation therapy. For best results, this care requires close collaboration between experts in each of these areas, including surgical oncologists, gynecologic oncologist, medical oncologist, pulmonologist and gastroenterologists, and diagnostic and interventional radiologists, and support staff in clinical trials and nurse navigation, in addition to the Radiation Oncology team. Accordingly, linacs are best situated, and most effectively used, inside comprehensive cancer centers where they are in immediate proximity to these multidisciplinary teams.

Over the past 30+ years, FirstHealth has invested in advanced technologies and expert staff to develop and expand cancer care capabilities. Because of these investments, we now have an integrated, multidisciplinary team of cancer care experts and are able to provide comprehensive cancer care comparable to larger facilities in Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, and Wilmington. We are the only cancer center with these comprehensive capabilities in the southeastern part of the state, between Charlotte and Wilmington, and serve as a regional referral center for an area much larger than our CON service area. Accordingly, the population of our service area does not accurately reflect the number of patients who require our care.

As a result we are very busy, and our volume of cancer patients continues to grow. We currently have two linacs, but treat a volume of patients that would normally require three or four linacs. In fact, we have one of the highest volumes of treatments per linac of any facility in the state. To provide care for this volume of patients with only two linacs, our staff must treat patients steadily from 6 am to at least 6 pm every weekday, and occasionally long hours on weekends (if one of the two linacs is undergoing maintenance or repairs). This kind of schedule is not only stressful for staff, but can be challenging for patients, some of whom must travel significant distances early or late in the day for their daily scheduled radiation treatments. Furthermore, because our department is so busy, some patients must wait one to two weeks, until a scheduled treatment time slot becomes available, before beginning their course of radiation treatments.

Installing a third linac in our Cancer Center will not only eliminate the stress on patients and staff associated with our current scheduling challenges, it will also free up staff to continue to learn new techniques and implement new technologies, so that we can continue to improve cancer care.

In summary, patients from this region of the state rely upon us to provide comprehensive cancer care of the highest quality, and the number of patients that we serve continues to grow. In order to continue to provide these essential cancer care services, we seek your approval of our request for a need determination for an additional linac in Service Area 17.

Thank you for your consideration.