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SUNY Downstate and Maimonides partner to expand cancer services in Brooklyn

SUNY Downstate and Maimonides Health have forged a hematology-oncology partnership that aims to increase access to cancer care for underserved communities in Brooklyn, the organizations announced Thursday.

Through the collaboration, patients can access specialists, facilities and therapies at both SUNY Downstate and Maimonides. SUNY Downstate, which is the only academic medical center in Brooklyn, will share its resident physician workforce with Maimonides, according to the agreement.

The partnership follows previous collaborations between the two institutions in neurology and pathology. The hematology-oncology partnership will begin taking patients today, the health systems said.

SUNY Downstate and Maimonides are aiming to expand cancer care to residents of East Flatbush and the surrounding areas, which are home to around 133,000 people. The majority of residents are people of color and are disproportionately low-income or uninsured.

The collaboration expands cancer services in Brooklyn, reducing the need for patients to travel to obtain care. Currently there are some cancers that SUNY Downstate is unable to treat, including some that require complex chemotherapy regimens. Rather than send patients to Manhattan to receive complex care, the partnership will allow patients to access treatment in the borough where they live, the organizations said.

Additionally, the collaboration aims to improve cancer screenings, as preventive care including mammograms and colonoscopies has plummeted

during the Covid-19 pandemic, said Dr. Wayne Riley, president of SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University.

“We know that Black and brown communities, or communities of low socioeconomic status, tend to have worse outcomes with their cancer because it’s discovered later,” Riley said. “Screening is a critically important aspect of this new relationship.”

Ken Gibbs, chief executive of Maimonides Health, said the hematology-oncology partnership will be a “central access point for diagnosis of cancers,” adding that the partnership will target high-incidence cancers in central Brooklyn, such as breast cancer, prostate cancer and colon cancer. It also will offer combined resources to treat non-Hodgkin’s lymphomas, which are diagnosed in 14 per 100,000 people each year in the East Flatbush area, according to the New York Cancer Registry.

In the next year, Riley said, the collaboration could expand the number of cancer patients that SUNY Downstate treats by as much as 10%.

University Hospital at SUNY Downstate operates 342 beds. Maimonides Health, Brooklyn’s largest health system, serves more than 300,000 patients across its three hospitals and 80 community-based practices and clinics. — Amanda D’Ambrosio