

# Unusual cancer clinic to reopen at Fermilab

By William Grady  
Tribune staff reporter

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An unusual cancer-treatment clinic, which closed after struggling to attract patients and funding, plans to reopen next month with a new partner and renewed interest in research at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

Tucked into a corner of the sprawling high-energy physics facility near Batavia, the low-profile clinic had treated more than 3,100 patients since 1976 using subatomic particles called neutrons produced by Fermi's linear accelerator.

But the clinic closed in May 2003 when Provena St. Joseph Hospital in Elgin could no longer offer financial support. It will reopen as an affiliate of Northern Illinois University, officials announced Monday.

Now called the NIU Institute for Neutron Therapy at Fermilab, officials said treatments could resume in mid-January.

U.S. House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) has promised \$2.7 million in federal funding to the university over three years to help restart the clinic, said John Peters, NIU president.

Neutron therapy is a type of radiation treatment considered effective in fighting cancers of the salivary gland, advanced prostate cancer and some head and neck tumors.

The program at Fermi was funded by the National Cancer Institute from 1975 to 1985, then was operated at various times by what is now Rush University Medical Center and Provena St. Joseph.

But attracting patients seems to have been a chronic problem for the clinic, which lacked the visibility of major university medical centers. Cutting-edge cancer treatments are more often associated with those centers than with high-energy physics labs like Fermi.

Provena St. Joseph had been treating about 100 patients a year and could have treated an additional 50, officials said.

One of those patients was Don Young, 82, a Downers Grove resident who opted to use neutron therapy when he was diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer about four years ago. Young, a former employee at Fermi, said a urologist had recommended surgery, but he decided to look for other options.

"I think I made the right decision," he said.

Many of the cancers treated by neutron therapy are relatively rare, and the therapy is not widely available--the clinic at Fermilab is one of only three such facilities in the U.S.

Another issue for the clinic is attracting money for research, which could lead to new uses for neutron therapy. These new discoveries would improve the clinic's visibility in the medical community.

That will be one of the benefits of the new affiliation with NIU, said Peters and Dr. Aidnag Diaz, the clinic's new medical director.

A benefit for patients is that neutron therapy usually requires fewer treatments--typically a dozen compared with the 30 or 40 treatments required for conventional radiation therapy.

"Neutron therapy is not experimental and is not a treatment of last resort," Diaz said.

He said most health insurance plans will cover the treatments.