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UAMS Raises \$15 Million Toward NCI Designation

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) announced today that it has raised more than \$15 million towards NCI Designation, the halfway point toward its \$30 million goal.

A recent \$1 million gift from Kim and Chris Fowler of Jonesboro, who were in attendance at the news conference, put UAMS over the halfway mark.

“Raising \$15 million for a single cause in such a short time is remarkable, and I want to thank every single donor who has helped make this possible,” said Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA, UAMS chancellor and UAMS Health CEO. “We are humbled and extremely grateful to the Fowlers for their generosity and love for their fellow Arkansans. The Fowler family is beloved and well-known for being successful in business, but they are also known for their giving spirit. This gift is representative of that.”

“Cancer did not take a break during the pandemic, and neither did we,” said Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute Director Michael J. Birrer, M.D., Ph.D. “NCI Designation is an ambitious challenge that demands the hearts and minds of everyone you see here, and hundreds more across UAMS and the state of Arkansas.”

Chris Fowler is the president of Fowler Foods, Inc. He is a first-generation Taco Bell and a second-generation KFC franchisee owner. Together, Kim and Chris Fowler own and operate over 91 KFCs and Taco Bell restaurants in an eight-state area.

The Fowlers made their gift in appreciation of James Y. Suen, M.D., who treated Chris Fowler when he was diagnosed with throat cancer in 2011. The gift also continues the philanthropic legacy of Chris Fowler’s parents, Wallace W. and Jama Fowler, who have given millions to support health care and education in northeast Arkansas.

“Kim and I are honored to make this donation in honor of James Suen, a truly world-class doctor,” said Fowler. “A lot of people say, I owe my life to someone, but I can truly say it, not only to Dr. Suen but the entire team at UAMS. The people of Arkansas don’t

UAMS Raises \$15 Million Toward NCI Designation

Page 2

know what they truly have at UAMS until they need it. It is a diamond in the rough. We know that UAMS will continue to provide world-class treatment through not only the citizens of Arkansas, but across the world.”

“I am pleased to share that we are making strong progress toward our goal, and gifts like Kim and Chris’s are essential in helping us continue to hire bright new researchers who can bring in additional grant funding,” Birrer said. “I can’t think of a better way to impact the future of Arkansas than to invest in better health the way the Fowlers have.”

The Cancer Institute has hired multiple researchers over the past year, with 10 coming in March. They are part of the first wave of research expansion and growth as the Cancer Institute builds toward applying for NCI Designation.

NCI Designation is a highly competitive assessment process during which cancer centers must demonstrate outstanding depth and breadth of high-quality cancer research and treatment. Receiving designation brings substantial benefits, including the ability to access significant federal research funding and offer clinical trials not available to non-designated centers. It also is expected to result in a \$72 million economic impact on Arkansas and create approximately 1,500 new jobs over five years.

In 2019, the Arkansas Senate and House unanimously passed Senate Bill 151, which created an account to deposit funds for NCI Designation, and Gov. Asa Hutchinson signed Act 181 into law in March that year.

State lawmakers then approved a combination of taxes for the effort. UAMS has pledged to raise \$30 million in private funds to support that effort. It took just over three years to reach the halfway mark, most of which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are 71 NCI-designated cancer centers in 36 states across the country, with the closest to Arkansas being in Memphis (pediatrics only), Dallas and Oklahoma City.

Approximately 68 percent of the funds awarded by the National Cancer Institute for research and clinical trials goes to NCI-designated centers. The centers without such designation are left to compete for the other 32 percent, and many NCI community outreach and program grants are only offered to NCI-designated cancer centers.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* recognized UAMS Medical Center as a Best Hospital for 2021-22; ranked its ear, nose and throat program

UAMS Raises \$15 Million Toward NCI Designation

Page 3

among the top 50 nationwide for the third year; and named five areas as high performing — colon cancer surgery, diabetes, hip replacement, knee replacement and stroke. *Forbes* magazine ranked UAMS as seventh in the nation on its Best Employers for Diversity list. UAMS also ranked in the top 30% nationwide on *Forbes*' Best Employers for Women list and was the only Arkansas employer included. UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and six dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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