

August 10, 2022

Sandra Greene, DrPH, Chair
State Health Coordinating Council
North Carolina Division of Health Service Regulation
Healthcare Planning and Certificate of Need Section
2704 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2704

Re: Support for WakeMed's Petition for an Adjusted Need Determination for one Additional Linear Accelerator in Service Area 20

Dear Dr. Greene and Members of the State Health Coordinating Council:

In June of 2022, US News and World Report released their report on the healthiest counties in the United States. Wake County ranked first in North Carolina and was 147th nationally, beating the national average in all 10 major categories besides one: health equity. In this category, Wake County was far below average and one of the three worst counties among the top 200 healthiest counties in the country.

This is not a surprise to many given we are in a state without Medicaid expansion. WakeMed is surrounded by numerous census tracts of predominantly Black communities that have uninsured rates above 30% with over 70% of families living under 200% of the federal poverty level.

For years, our Wake County Chronic disease reports have demonstrated health disparities that mirror or exceed the national data: examples - relative risks of disease related mortality in Black vs general population in Wake County: Diabetes 3.64 women, 2.90 men; Kidney disease: 3.44 women, 2.66 men; Prostate Cancer: 2.55, Breast Cancer: 1.37.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that "access to healthcare" is listed as one of the top three priorities in the Wake County Community Health Needs Assessment to be released this summer. To effectively address this issue, we are going to have to be more strategic and collaborative in how we address these historic barriers to care that have resulted in the outcomes around disparities and inequities listed above.

WakeMed made the decision to launch its own oncology program based on gaps in care identified through our own community needs assessment, to provide a local treatment option for patients diagnosed with cancer at WakeMed. As part of this program, and to make care as comprehensive and coordinated as possible for patients, WakeMed is working to develop a radiation oncology department, which requires a linear accelerator to facilitate treatment. Patients need a comprehensive cancer program with radiation oncology services which are well-coordinated and in sync with their medical oncologist. Evidence from published studies demonstrates significant gains in patient/family experience and improved cancer outcomes without fragmentation of care. Maintaining adequate, local access to comprehensive cancer care is even more important given our population growth in Wake County and our aging population. Building capacity to ensure we meet these evolving and growing needs is essential.

Our goal is to better serve our mission of improving the health and well-being of our community by providing outstanding and compassionate care for all – care that is accessible and local – as we continue to work to address our community’s historic health inequities.

Sincerely,

Brian Klausner, MD
Executive Medical Director of WakeMed’s Center for Community Health, Innovations and Equity