

Tribes will help diabetes center

OU president seeks more funds to help research, treat disease

By Michael McNutt, Capitol Bureau

The Oklahoma Diabetes Center could receive up to \$6 million for endowed faculty positions for diabetes research and clinical care programs, it was announced Monday.

The Chickasaw and Choctaw nations pledged a total of \$3 million for endowed faculty positions. University of Oklahoma President David Boren said the university will apply for a matching amount from the state Regents for Higher Education.

Boren said efforts are ongoing to seek contributions from other tribes, nonprofit organizations and individuals.

Legislators this year approved \$12 million for OU to build a diabetes research and treatment center on its Oklahoma City and Tulsa campuses.

The center could become one of the nation's top research and treatment centers for diabetes, Boren said.

"Diabetes is a terrible disease and a terrible problem throughout this nation," Gov. Brad Henry said during a state Capitol ceremony.

"It is important that we take this step," said Henry, whose mother died from complications of diabetes. "This wouldn't happen without the partnership between the state of Oklahoma and our wonderful sovereign nations."

About one in every 10 Oklahomans has the disease, putting Oklahoma at the top among the states, said Boren, who has Type 2, or adult diabetes. Indians are more than twice as likely to have diabetes.

"Oklahoma is ideally suited, our people have the need, a desperate need for help in combating diabetes," Boren said.

The Chickasaw Nation will fund a \$1 million chair at the Oklahoma Diabetes Center this year, Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby said. The faculty position will be designated for the clinical director of the Oklahoma Diabetes Center's adult diabetes program.

The second Chickasaw Nation \$1 million endowed position in diabetes will be funded in 2007.

"It's only appropriate that the Indian tribes, the tribal governments participate in its planning and in its funding," Anoatubby said.

The new Chickasaw Nation positions in diabetes will complement the Chickasaw Nation-Children's Medical Research Institute Chair in Pediatric Diabetes, which was funded in 2005 by the Chickasaws and the children's institute.

The Choctaw Nation will fund two \$500,000 endowed faculty positions, one of which will be designated for pediatrics.

The Oklahoma Diabetes Center will develop statewide programs in diabetes care and research for adults and children with diabetes. Construction could happen as early as 2008.

Boren said OU already has a strong nucleus of diabetes researchers and physicians as part of the Oklahoma Diabetes Center. The university will have to continue recruiting scientists and clinicians if it is to become one of the leading diabetes centers in the country, he said.

Boren, who has lost 60 pounds since finding out last year he has diabetes, said he is dieting and exercising to keep the disease under control.

No cure exists for diabetes, which is a leading cause of heart attacks, strokes, amputations, blindness, kidney failure and fetal

mortality. The serious complications of diabetes are increasing in frequency among Indians, including rising rates of kidney failures, amputations and blindness, according to OU.

Latest studies indicate children born in the past five years have a one-in-three chance to develop diabetes in their lifetimes, Boren said.

"This is a milestone day, this is a day that will go down in the history of our state because it's a day when Oklahoma begins to assume national leadership in the fight against diabetes," Boren said.

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