

World's largest medical center expanding

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HOUSTON — The world's largest medical center is looking to get even bigger.

The Texas Medical Center is in the midst of the largest amount of construction in its history, with planned projects through 2014 totaling more than \$7 billion, officials said Wednesday. Most of the new construction will be for facilities for patient care, with the rest for research and office space.

There is more construction going on at the medical center than the rest of Houston combined, with about 60 percent of the construction cranes in the city at the world-renown facility.

The medical center has been home to such famed physicians as Michael DeBakey, the pioneer of coronary bypass surgery, and Denton Cooley, who performed the first artificial heart implant.

Officials say the medical center's square footage is already greater than the combined square footage of downtown buildings in El Paso, Fort Worth and San Antonio.

It ranks 17th on a list of major downtown business districts nationally, just below Los Angeles, and would shoot up to seventh with all the planned construction, said Richard Wainerdi, the president and chief executive of the medical center.

"It's very exciting," said Bob Stott, the medical center's executive vice president for planning and development. Stott attributed the medical center's growth spurt in part to the growing population in Houston and its suburbs. According to U.S. Census projections, Harris County's population is estimated to grow by 1 million residents in the next two decades with another 1 million in surrounding counties.

"Houston is just growing so fast," Stott said. "All the institutions (at the medical center) are sensing they need to expand as well."

The construction of new hospitals, clinics, research labs and other facilities will mean more jobs, said John Kajander, the medical center's senior vice president.

The current work force of 73,000 is expected to increase by more than 30,000 by 2014.

On any given day, more than 160,000 people visit the Texas Medical Center, including doctors, nurses, patients, students and volunteers, Stott said. The medical center is home to 46 institutions, including private, not-for-profit health facilities and government agencies.