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Community leaders launch campaign to gather patient stories, educate public about medical school

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Jay Janner/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

By Mary Ann Roser

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Published: 9:36 p.m. Monday, April 23, 2012

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What kind of experience have you had as a patient?

Sen. Kirk Watson and other community leaders said they want to hear all about it — the good and the bad.

Watson announced an effort Monday to collect patients' stories and educate local residents on progress toward a medical school.

A newly formed nonprofit, Healthy ATX, will provide a central location to share information about a medical school, teaching hospital and other health care improvements Watson outlined in September, he said.

"We're all in it together, and we all have a health care story," Watson, D-Austin, said at the news conference at the Lance Armstrong Foundation in East Austin.

The Lance Armstrong Foundation is financing a \$200,000 to \$300,000 study along with Central Health and the Shivers Cancer Foundation to assess the cancer services that Austin needs, said Doug Ulman, president and CEO of the Armstrong foundation.

At the news conference, which also included Mayor Lee Leffingwell, health care leaders and University of Texas officials, Ulman talked about being diagnosed with cancer in college and driving for hours to get treatment.

"This community should provide the best comprehensive cancer care," Ulman said. "That is why our foundation is so excited about this effort and putting so many resources into it."

Another of Watson's goals, to create a modern teaching hospital to replace University Medical Center Brackenridge, got a big boost Saturday.

UMC Brackenridge's owner, the local health care district Central Health, and the hospital's operator, the Seton Healthcare Family, agreed to collaborate on a replacement facility, with Seton providing up to \$250 million to build and equip the facility.

"I've never been involved in anything in my public life that has received this much momentum," Watson said.

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State Sen. Kirk Watson of Austin, joined by Seton, Central Health and University of Texas officials, announces the launch Monday of Healthy ATX.

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Seton will look at the new teaching hospital UT Southwestern Medical Center is building in Dallas for inspiration, said Charles Barnett, chairman-elect of the Seton board and president of health care operations for Ascension Health, Seton's owner. The William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital plans to open in January 2015 at a cost of \$800 million.

Rosie Mendoza, chairwoman of the Central Health board, said at the news conference that losing 50 pounds helped heal chronic back pain that surgery, injections and other treatments didn't fix.

"What's important here," she said, "is we have to take ownership of our health."

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Additional material from staff writer Ralph K. M. Haurwitz

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