

August 9, 2008 - Children's may be blueprint for military hospitals, Murtha says

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The \$625 million Children's Hospital under construction might provide good ideas for three military hospitals being built, Rep. John Murtha said Friday during a visit to the Lawrenceville complex.

"I like the way it's set up. I like the openness," Murtha, D-Johnstown, said while inspecting the brightly painted facility on a tour with Children's CEO Roger Oxendale and other officials and doctors.

"It's an expensive proposition, but well-organized as far as I can see, and I've been to a lot of hospitals."

The Children's Hospital complex, on the site of the former St. Francis Hospital, is scheduled to start admitting patients from the Oakland hospital it replaces in May. A research center on the site is set to open in October.

As chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, Murtha, an 18-term congressman, has been instrumental in securing nearly \$40 million in defense funding for Children's Hospital in recent years.

The money supports research into curing diabetes and preventing childhood obesity. Dr. Massimo Trucco, chief of research for the Diabetes Institute of Pittsburgh and head of immunogenetics at the hospital, said the Department of Defense has much deeper pockets than the National Institutes of Health, a traditional source of research money.

With that higher level of support, Trucco said the researchers he oversees are perhaps three to six years away from "major changes and improvements" in the treatment of juvenile-onset, or type 1, diabetes.

The disease strikes about 30,000 Americans a year, requiring daily insulin shots. Trucco and research colleague Nick Giannoukakis this summer published results of a study showing a new vaccine that reverses the disease in mice. Clinical trials with humans are under way at Children's.

Defense spending has funded the creation of a Weight Management and Wellness Center at the hospital, said its director, Dr. Silva Arslanian. That center has treated more than 3,500 young patients, Arslanian said. It focuses on reducing obesity, a top cause of the more common type 2 diabetes.

"This fits very nicely with (Murtha's) whole prevention approach," she said.

Murtha, 75, is an advocate for lung and breast cancer research. He visited the Joyce Murtha Breast Care Center at Windber Medical Center near Johnstown on Wednesday. It's named after his wife.

Murtha, a former Marine, is facing Republican challenger Bill Russell, an Army veteran, in the fall election.