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## Hamilton Institute quickly gaining global reputation

By Daniel Connolly  
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The Hamilton Eye Institute had its grand opening less than three years ago. In the short time since, it's made rapid progress on its way to becoming a regional treatment center and a global contributor to the study of diseases and injuries of the eyes.

With parts of its building in the Medical Center still under construction, the institute is already taking on an international role. This month the institute, affiliated with the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, is helping organize a conference on retinoblastoma, a type of eye cancer prevalent in the third world. Scientists and doctors from as far away as Brazil, India and Jordan will gather here.

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Institute can have a global impact by focusing on a simple goal: preventing blindness and maximizing vision.

"And we do that any way we can," he said. The institute trains doctors, treats patients, backs research and influences public policy for the benefit of patients, he said.

Like St. Jude, the Hamilton Institute combines research, training and patient treatment under one roof and recruits the best people it can find, Haik said. It's hired about 25 high-level physicians and researchers so far.

And like St. Jude, it's highly dependent on raising funds – it was launched without state tax dollars.

The institute is named after the family of Dr. Ralph S. Hamilton, who started helping in his father's practice when he was 15 and still practices today at age 77.

Hamilton was one of the leaders in setting up the institute several years ago and also contributed \$6 million of family funds, a fact that seemed to embarrass the tall, gray-haired doctor in a recent interview.

That donation was part of the \$60 million in cash and pledges organizers raised to launch the institute. The institute has strong ties to many local hospitals – for instance, Baptist Memorial Health Care Corp. donated the building on Madison that houses the institute. Other funding sources include federal grants and donations from individuals.

Haik and Hamilton pointed out the highlights of the busy institute on a recent tour.

In a conference room, Malak Kotb was poring over a mass of papers with graduate student Ramy Naguib and postdoctoral fellow Lidia Gardner.

Kotb said the group was preparing an article on cancer for submission to Science, a premier academic journal.

A few minutes later, Eldon Geisert, a professor of ophthalmology, explained that a spinoff company that he co-founded had discovered a promising drug for eye cancer and brain tumors and plans to take it to the Food and Drug Administration for tests.

In a clinic downstairs, patients waited for appointments. The institute saw a total of 15,000 children and adults in 2006, Haik said, and accepts poor patients.

He pointed out doctors talking in a hall. "Peter Netland I recruited from Harvard," he said, pointing out one of the white-coated figures, a specialist in glaucoma. And he said the institute plans to recruit more top researchers.

The institute now plans to build a \$4 million surgery center on its third floor and has plans for an additional 20,000 square feet of lab space.

That means more fund-raising. George Cates, the retired CEO of Mid-America Apartment Communities, is a leader of the effort to raise roughly \$15 million.

"We'll ask people to give us money," he said. "No magic."



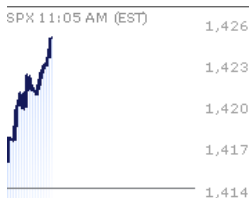
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Dr. Barrett G. Haik, of the Hamilton Eye Institute at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, explains what the institute is all about.

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