

\$7.5 million released for MGH

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Officials with the United States Department of Agriculture have agreed to first release more than \$7.5 million of a two-part loan to Morehouse General Hospital for renovations, with the balance of the \$12.5 package to be issued in phases, hospital CEO Cheryl Faulkenberry said Tuesday.

"We don't have (the money) in the bank yet," she said. "We're working on the guaranteed portion right now, which is \$4.6 million. The direct portion is \$7.8 million, and that will be forthcoming."

Neither Faulkenberry nor USDA officials have released a date when that money is expected to be delivered to Morehouse General. USDA Louisiana

Director Clyde Holloway did not immediately return a message for comment.

The money "will come in phases through the construction process," Faulkenberry said.

The entire loan is expected to be used to renovate the emergency department, add an MRI/CT build-out, replace the second-floor air handling unit, improve and make additions to the exterior and main entry and replace some equipment.

"We have a very complex project with multiple components," Faulkenberry said. "The largest part of the project is funded via a direct loan from the USDA at a very low interest rate. A smaller part of the project is funded via a guaranteed loan, which involves a commercial lender. In the end, we anticipate that the project will infuse approxi-

mately \$12.5 million into our hospital."

Some of that money, she said, will be received "on an interim basis" and will be used to refinance debt.

"This approval of the USDA loan is a huge step forward for Morehouse General Hospital," Faulkenberry said in a press release from U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander. "It will allow us to continue to provide much-needed health-care services to the people of Morehouse Parish and surrounding communities. The loan will also assist us in continuing to improve our financial situation and sustain long-term viability."

Alexander praised the hospital's efforts in securing the funds.

"The improvements that will be made will enable the people of Morehouse Parish to continue obtaining quality health care at the local level," he said.

U.S. Sen. David Vitter agreed.

"The Morehouse Parish Hospital provides an invaluable service to the local community, and the doctors and nurses who serve so faithfully at the hospital require the very best equipment to provide their patients with the medical care they deserve," he said.

"It was imperative that the hospital was successful in securing this loan, and I worked closely with officials at the USDA to see that this happened."

Separately, Dr. John P. Robert has joined Morehouse General as a board certified surgeon. Dr. Shazhad Malik of Morehouse Community Medical Centers received certification in pediatric infectious diseases from the American Board of Pediatrics following a two-year fellowship at Tulane University.