

Medical researcher doubles size of HQ, triples payroll

Jack Hagel, Staff Writer

DURHAM - Medical researcher Health Decisions is doubling the size of its headquarters and almost tripling its payroll as demand for its services surges.

The Durham company agreed to lease 42,000 square feet in Meridian Business Park, off Interstate 40 near Research Triangle Park. That's twice what it leases at the Quadrangle business park at I-40 and N.C. 54, said Guy Harvey, the Staubach broker who represents Health Decisions.

"We're stacked up to the ceiling, said Michael Rosenberg, chief executive of Health Decisions.

Health Decisions, a contract research organization that helps pharmaceutical companies test medicines before they go to market, has grown as pharmaceutical companies try to streamline data collection and find other ways to perform more efficiently.

Many researchers take handwritten notes on drug-test subjects and then enter data into the computer. Health Decisions developed an optical-sensor pen that collects handwritten data and eliminates a step in data entry.

"The big issue with any pharmaceutical company is how long it takes and how expensive it is to test products," Rosenberg said. "We have a model that we think is quite a bit more efficient."

Rosenberg is projecting \$16 million in sales this year, about double last year's total.

Hence the need for more people.

The company already has 125 Triangle employees. The move to Meridian this spring would make way for 200 additional jobs over the next two years. More could follow; Health Decisions has an option to expand into an additional 21,000 square feet.

Health Decisions wanted to move to Castalia at Meadowmont, a mixed-use project Rosenberg is building in Chapel Hill. But the company couldn't wait for the delayed project to open in late 2008.

The deal will help tighten the office market in and around Research Triangle Park. The submarket's office vacancy rate has climbed to 18.4 percent from 14.4 percent in the year ending June 30.

The contract research industry is growing, particularly in the Triangle, as regulatory scrutiny forces drug makers to conduct more tests.

Quintiles Transnational said in November that it would add about 1,000 jobs in Durham to grow to 2,000 local employees by 2012.

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