

Dec. 20th, 2023 Briefing Transcript

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Good morning. I'm Dr. Daniel Podolsky, President of UT Southwestern Medical Center, and I welcome all of you who are joining me for what is the last of our campus briefings for calendar year 2023. It's certainly been quite a year, and I think everybody on the campus has every right to be proud for what we've accomplished together.

So before jumping into updates on various activities here on the campus since I gave a last briefing, I will note that we have now shifted to a cadence in which we are doing these briefings on a quarterly basis. Having noted that, I'm delighted to take the first few minutes here to make note of some new colleagues who have joined us in important leadership positions since the time of my last briefing.

I'll start by noting that we are fortunate to now have Dr. Jon Efron as our Executive Vice President for Health System Affairs. Dr. Efron, himself a renowned colorectal surgeon, joins us from Johns Hopkins where he has had many leadership roles over his years there, including oversight and leadership for the physician group. Dr. Efron began on Dec. 1, and by some cosmic coincidence, we were also joined on that date by our new Chair of Radiology, Dr. Marty Pomper, who also comes to us from Johns Hopkins.

Dr. Pomper is really a pioneer in an emerging branch of radiology called theranostics, where agents can not only be used to image a disease process but also themselves have some therapeutic benefit in treating that process. I'm truly delighted to have both Dr. Efron and Dr. Pomper joining us from Johns Hopkins.

Soon to join us is Dr. Sherry Huang, and she's been selected as our new Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Education. She'll take over that role Feb. 1, succeeding Dr. Chuck Ginsburg, who's provided outstanding leadership, for many years, of our educational programs, both in our schools and in our training programs across the campus. She's also a Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Gastroenterology, currently at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, previously having been on the faculty and a leader at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine.

Looking forward to the new year, as recently announced by our Provost and Dean, Dr. Andy Lee, and the Director of our [Simmons] Cancer Center, Dr. Carlos Arteaga, Dr. Jason Fleming, who is currently Chair of Gastrointestinal Oncology at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida, will arrive here on March 1 for the newly established role of Deputy Director for Clinical Affairs of the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center. In this instance for Dr. Fleming, it's a return to some of his roots. Dr. Fleming pursued his residency training and joined our faculty in Surgery before leaving for some number of years on the faculty of MD Anderson, then on to the Moffitt Center where he is now – all his preparation for an important leadership role to advance our clinical programs under the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center.

And as I wrap up noting these leadership changes, either already accomplished or coming in the near future, I realize I missed one of the former. Dr. Joe Merola joined UT Southwestern, coming from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, as our new Chair of Dermatology, and he began in that important role in mid-October.

So, having now made note of some new colleagues, either here or soon to be here, I want to take a moment to recognize some members of our faculty who have earned well-deserved recognition for their achievements. In October, Dr. Cathy Spong, who is Professor and Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, was recognized for her many contributions to the field of maternal-fetal medicine and was inducted into the National Academy of Medicine. UT Southwestern, for those who may be wondering, has more members of the National Academy of Medicine than any other institution in Texas. And Dr. Spong's induction builds on our institution's legacy of excellence in science and medicine.

Other recent recognitions include Dr. James Chen being awarded the 2023 Louisa Gross Horwitz Prize presented by Columbia University. The award recognizes his groundbreaking work on innate immunity and for advancing basic research in this field. And just last week, the National Academy of Inventors announced that Professor Jinming Gao, a member of our Department of Biomedical Engineering as well as the Departments of Cell Biology, Otolaryngology, and Pharmacology, was elected to its 2023 class of Fellows for that National Academy of Inventors. This is the highest professional distinction awarded solely to inventors. And I would note, because this is an academy which we have heard less about over the years compared to the National Academy of Science and the National Academy of Medicine, [other National Academy of Inventors Fellows at UTSW] include Dr. Michael Brown, Dr. Joe Goldstein, Dr. Sam Achilefu, and the newly arrived Dr. Marty Pomper.

I'd like now to turn to what I do consider a really important initiative on our campus as we undertake it each year, and that is the Values in Practice engagement survey. I want to thank all of you who participated in that survey, completing it. In fact, we reached what is for us a record response rate of nearly 80% – 77% to be specific. And this means that we have a chance to hear about your experiences, about your insights that can help guide us to make UT Southwestern an even better place for people to work and to feel fulfilled in the work that they do. Beyond filling out the survey, I note that we received nearly 15,000 comments. That's foundational information, rich with insights that we can learn from. Each of the managers across our campus has now had a chance to see the responses – confidential and anonymous to them – of those who work in their areas to understand where there are opportunities to improve.

I want to acknowledge those managers who we see from those responses are clearly doing an outstanding job of supporting their teams and making UT Southwestern a great experience. We certainly expect for those who we find that there is room for improvement to develop real action plans, which we will be following up to be sure they have the desired impact to improve the environment where we see there is both that possibility and, frankly, the need.

So I would say just by overall comment, the highest scoring items were related to individuals feeling their work is meaningful, our organizational core value of excellence, and UT Southwestern providing a great experience for patients. I would note overall that we've had a relatively stable employee satisfaction mark at 79, which is about 5 points above the academic medical center benchmark and in the top 10% of health care organizations.

Having noted some of the highest scoring areas, the areas, broadly speaking, where we can see the opportunity for improvement include well-being, feeling connected, and teams collaborating on the most effective way to get things done. As mentioned, right now, having gotten the benefit of your input, we will be working with managers to develop action plans to address the opportunities as I've outlined them, at least the ones that were most common in the responses that we got back.

Now, let me take a few minutes to update you on a variety of our capital projects. These are investments in our future. I would note, as I have on past occasions, that buildings for us are not an end in and of themselves. They are a means to an end, which is our ability to deliver on our mission, whether that's providing a great environment for our students and other learners, being able to carry out research which ultimately will impact the health of really everyone, and of course our ability to deliver the kind of care any one of us would want for ourselves or our family to every patient who comes to UT Southwestern.

So let me begin by taking a minute to give you a status report on the Texas Behavioral Health Center at UT Southwestern. For those of you who have not been to the south end of the campus, that is the end closest toward downtown, you see that the shape of that really important new facility is very rapidly emerging. This facility will eventually include 200 beds for adult patients and also include nearly 100 beds for the care of pediatric patients. It is on track, maybe even a couple of weeks ahead of schedule, for the adult portion to be completed in its construction in the summer of 2025, with the pediatric tower to follow about six months later.

Already a vibrant place on our campus and really something that has been newly dedicated since my last briefing is the Texas Instruments Biomedical Engineering and Sciences Building. This is on the [East] Campus. We had a dedication in October. This is already a facility that has the energy of the innovative members of our own Department of Biomedical Engineering working literally side by side with faculty colleagues from the University of Texas at Dallas. And so I think this is a really important addition to our institution and our commitment to really look for every opportunity to advance our insight into health care and to improve it.

Moving beyond that Texas Instruments Biomedical Engineering and Sciences Building, I'm pleased to note that we have received approval from our Board of Regents to proceed in partnership with Children's Health System of Texas with the construction of a pediatric campus. We'll be following this project over the next six years as an ambitious undertaking, and I look forward to giving you periodic updates on the progress there. I want to express appreciation for the many people who have been involved in getting us to this point in planning, certainly our faculty and our administrative leadership, working together with counterparts from Children's, and a special thanks to Dr. Maeve Sheehan, who is really spearheading this together with Becky McCulley for UT Southwestern and making sure that we are on target for accomplishing what we are setting out to do, which is the best environment possible for the care of pediatric patients and support of their families.

Finally, as many will be aware because they have been directly affected, we are moving along in the renovation of the Zale Lipshy Pavilion. We're now seven months into what is an 18-month refresh of that facility. I understand this has provided stress in a number of different ways as we have needed to consolidate all surgery at the ambulatory center or at Clements [University Hospital], having shut down the ORs at Zale Lipshy. And I'm just grateful for the forbearance in having effected that transition in a pretty seamless way. And I couldn't help but note, remarkably, despite that transition and the close of

Zale Lipshy, we had a new record last week in terms of the number of surgeries and procedures accomplished on a single day.

So, having covered our capital projects, I'm happy to reflect on this past weekend when on Sunday we had the great event of the commencement for our graduating students in the School of Health Professions – 130 students received their degrees across the six different disciplines. It was great to see the energy of the family and friends who filled up the Gooch Auditorium and then some and to see these very accomplished students now ready to go out and practice their professions and translate their experience here into help for patients and their families.

And finally, before I come to a few quick coming attractions, I want to take a minute to provide you with a status report as we now have three months of the fiscal year behind us. I'll remind you, our fiscal year begins Sept. 1, and we've had a chance now to see the results through November. As I've shared on past briefings, we knew the environment this year, like last year, would be challenging, [with] increases in expenses due to the impact of inflation. But I am very glad to report that we are on target on our budget, which is to say, with a very modest positive margin. It will take real discipline for us to deliver on that budget through the remainder of the year, though I am certainly optimistic betting on the commitment, the hard work of everybody across UT Southwestern on the main campus and, I should make note, also in our various satellite facilities.

In the long term, we will need to find ways to further improve our financial performance through the balance of finding ways in which there are savings on the expense side of the equation without compromising our mission and of course seeing where there may be opportunities to enhance revenue. In the long term, we hope to achieve a 3% margin. And you might ask why a 3% margin? Experience and common wisdom have shown that you need that 3% over time to reinvest when eventually you need to replace the facilities in which you're carrying out your mission. As one example, we have 70-year-old pipes on some of the South Campus, and that may not sound like the most exciting thing to think about, but they need to be replaced so all of our facilities can continue to support that.

So that's our goal. We did not expect we would reach that this year, but we are determined to be in positive territory and build to get back to that point, which is really a goal we need to achieve over time. I think if we can stay on our budget this year, and even more so if we can do at least somewhat better than it, UT Southwestern will remain in a strong financial position to continue to deliver on the mission as we have done year in and year out.

So I will finally just touch on a few coming attractions. When we return from the holidays, those who are interested will have the opportunity to join our UT Southwestern community for a neighborhood cleanup on Jan. 13 in the South Dallas Fair Park District from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Volunteers will receive a T-shirt and breakfast and are invited to join a lunchtime celebration with food, music, and speakers at the MLK Junior Community Center after the cleanup. For additional details and the full schedule, please visit our UTSW events page.

Four days later, we will have our institutional annual tribute honoring the memory of Martin Luther King [Jr.], and that will be held at noon on Jan. 17. It's a special commemorative celebration for our community year after year, and more details will be shared in the coming weeks.

And also in January, the Executive Vice Presidents and I will take part in a virtual town hall on the 31st, when, along with my own comments, you'll have a chance to hear from the EVPs directly, and, most importantly, it's a chance for us to address the questions that you may have about anything going on on the campus. I view the town hall as different from my campus briefing, as it's an opportunity to really take a look at key strategic initiatives and, as I say, to be sure you have a chance to hear your questions addressed. So I really hope everybody who's listening this morning and anybody you may talk to will plan to join us on Jan. 31.

And with that, let me conclude by wishing everybody here at UT Southwestern the very best for the remainder of our holiday season. I hope you have all received the letter that went out just before Thanksgiving that endeavored to highlight just some of the many things that have been accomplished. But even with those being not a complete review of everything that's accomplished, it still, I think by anybody's measure, is something that we as a community can be very proud of. I want to wish all of you the very best, as I said, for the remaining holiday season and for the coming new year. I'm grateful that I get to witness our values in practice on really a daily basis, and those certainly at the forefront include compassion, kindness, and excellence that you bring to work every day.

So, with that, I'm going to conclude my remarks and, within the relatively short time remaining, address questions that you have forwarded, which will be posed, as they have since we began these briefings 3½ years ago, by Jenny Doren.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

It's gone by fast. Thank you, Dr. Podolsky. I will begin with the ever-popular topic of parking and what is being done to address a lack of available spaces, specifically at Clements University Hospital?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, I appreciate the question and I know this has been a challenge. It doesn't solve the problem, but I hope that you take some comfort in knowing that it's very much a front of mind issue, one I've discussed with Dr. Efron and Chris Rubio, our COO and interim CEO of Clements University Hospital. For context, CUH has experienced increased clinical activity due to the combination of just growing numbers of patients wanting to come to us over the years, and that continues, as well as the movement of surgical cases from Zale Lipshy, as I commented in my update. This has increased the need for parking for our patients, families, and staff.

As of this week, we are now doing the following: First, new employees who would normally be assigned parking in one of the CUH garages will be placed on a waitlist and assigned to the Cancer Care Outpatient Building parking garage, which is of course on the other side of Harry Hines, until space is available in the CUH garage. Second, a dedicated shuttle is moving employees between the garage and CUH from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. And finally, Parking Services estimates that individuals on the waitlist will be there for approximately three to four weeks before being offered parking at one of the CUH garages. As some will note, in addition to this, what we have already done is lease space from the Ben E. Keith Company to expand and accommodate additional parking. And in the longer term, we plan to construct a new garage, an additional garage. It will be just across Record Crossing as part of a larger project to also increase imaging on that side of the street.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Well aside from parking, some colleagues have also raised concerns over housekeeping issues, such as trash collection and recycling. Is anything being done in response to those concerns?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

I appreciate this question as well. I know we've had, to a varying degree across the campus, a bit of a rocky few months as we have switched vendors for providing those custodial services. For those who were not aware, most of our custodial services for many years have been provided by an outside contractor. And one of the major contractors that is covering the nonhospital and mostly nonclinical parts of the campus was found to have a number of deficiencies that necessitated putting out requests for proposals for a new contract. And that new provider, called SSC Services, began coincident with our new fiscal year on Sept. 1.

I think we now realize that they did not fully appreciate just how big a job this would be. Also, there were fewer of the custodial workers who had previously been employed by the prior contractor who stayed to join with this new SSC. I know Holly Crawford, as our Executive Vice President for Business Affairs, has this on her watch on a daily basis. It is also more directly under the responsibility of Orlando Salazar, Director of Building Maintenance and operations. And I do believe, and we judge this by the feedback we are getting, we are making steady progress. Knowing that it still has not yet achieved the level of excellence that we should expect and will demand, I encourage those who are still seeing areas where there has not been the frequency of trash pickup or any other deficiencies to please convey that to either Ms. Crawford's office or more directly to Orlando Salazar. Let me share a number for that – the Facilities service desk at 214-648-3375.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Thank you for the added information. We have time for one more question. We look forward to asking more during the town hall on Jan. 31. Can you comment on some campus construction around Inwood Avenue? Are we erecting new signage or connecting the North Campus to the East Campus?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

So the construction that's going on around the road at the intersection of Inwood and Harry Hines is a project which will extend the University's power grid to East Campus. And the work is underway along Inwood Road currently at North Campus and will cross under Inwood to East Campus between Redfield and Forest Park.

I would additionally note that this intersection is an integral part of a Southwestern Medical District Urban Streetscape Master Plan, creating a more holistic green campus that unites the community, promotes health, healing, and safety, and acts as an intersection of health and nature. Phase one of that reimagined part of the intersection, or really the heart of our campus sitting as it is right at the cross sections of all four campuses, that phase one includes a proposed pedestrian bridge across Inwood connecting our East Campus to the O'Donnell Grove on North Campus.

A second phase of the project would add a 10-acre elevated park over the entire intersection, really to a degree similar to Klyde Warren Park in downtown Dallas. This plan, to be clear, is not a UT Southwestern plan, though we are very actively involved in thinking it through and will be doing what we can to accommodate the vision. It's being spearheaded by the Texas Trees Foundation and is still in the design

phase, so it will likely take several years for implementation. You can learn more about it if you're interested on the Texas Trees Foundation website at texastrees.org.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Well, thank you Dr. Podolsky. It's exciting. Best wishes to you and your family for a happy and healthy holiday season and new year.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Thank you, Jenny. Same to you.