

# UT Southwestern Medical Center

## Looking Ahead to the New Academic Year

Sept. 22, 2021

To the UT Southwestern Community:

As we begin a new fiscal year and the start of the 2021-22 academic year, I write to welcome those who are new to the UT Southwestern community and provide an overview of our institutional priorities for the year ahead. As I shared during the Town Hall held yesterday, UT Southwestern continues to make significant advances in all aspects of our mission, thanks to the dedication and commitment of each of you: our faculty, staff, and learners. In that context, I am pleased to highlight the initiatives that will be among our institutional priorities in this new year:

### **COVID-19**

As a community, we continue to face the unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 that has dominated much of our professional and personal lives for the last 18 months. The foremost priority of FY22 will be to prepare for and respond to the various challenges that the pandemic presents, including the health and well-being of each of you, along with the patients and families we serve. I greatly appreciate and understand that it can be difficult to remain positive and resilient for such an enduring period of time, but I encourage each of you to look to your colleagues for support and encouragement and to make use of the [wellness resources](#) available to support your health and well-being.

### **Academic Affairs**

Advancing plans for the launch of our **UT Southwestern School of Public Health** will be a significant focus of Academic Affairs this year. As our first new school in more than 50 years and our fourth school overall, I am especially eager to see our vision to advance the science of public health through research and innovation while preparing a robust public health workforce come to life for the benefit of those who live in North Texas and beyond. Our work in FY22 will make sure we are ready to welcome the first class of M.P.H. students in the fall of 2023 and Ph.D. students in the fall of 2024.

Another priority this fiscal year in Academic Affairs will be the expansion of our Biomedical Engineering Program, which should be galvanized by the arrival later this year of Dr. Samuel Achilefu, our inaugural BME Department Chair. To enable growth of our efforts in the longer term, site preparations have already begun for a **new biomedical engineering and science building** located on East Campus, a project undertaken in collaboration with our colleagues at UT Dallas.

**Recruitment of new leaders for several academic departments and centers and retention of existing faculty** will continue to be a priority. I am pleased to note that efforts led by our Executive Vice

President for Academic Affairs, Provost and Dean, Dr. W. P. Andrew Lee, have resulted in recent appointments of new Chairs to three of our academic departments: Dr. Catherine Spong as our new Chair of Obstetrics & Gynecology, Dr. J. William Harbour as our new Chair of Ophthalmology, and, as noted already, Dr. Samuel Achilefu as our inaugural Chair of Biomedical Engineering. In this new year, we anticipate appointment of new Chairs for several additional departments including Cell Biology, Pediatrics, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, and Radiation Oncology.

### **Health System Affairs**

The entire UT Southwestern community should take pride in the redesignation last week of the UT Southwestern University Health System as Magnet® status by the American Nurses Credentialing Center, as well as the recent redesignation of the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center as a Comprehensive Cancer Center by the National Cancer Institute. In addition, earlier this summer William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital was designated by *U.S. News & World Report* as the No. 1 Best Hospital in Dallas-Fort Worth for the fifth year in a row. In FY22, our ongoing clinical transformation efforts led by our Executive Vice President for Health System Affairs, Dr. John Warner, and his team will **continue to focus on further enhancing the quality and safety of care across our organization**. A critical component of our plans to expand access to UT Southwestern services includes growing our presence in Fort Worth, Frisco, Las Colinas, Richardson, and in southern Dallas County at the redeveloped RedBird Mall. In this new year, working with our partner Children's Health on our Joint Pediatric Enterprise will be an important priority.

Since the conclusion of the 87<sup>th</sup> Texas State Legislative session in May when funds were appropriated for planning and land acquisition for construction of the **first state psychiatric hospital in the Dallas-Fort Worth region**, we have been working with the leadership of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to advance this vitally needed project. Throughout the coming fiscal year and beyond, UT Southwestern is committed to leveraging our core competencies to increase the availability of mental health care, advance the research needed to develop the next generation of treatments, and expand the mental health workforce.

**Southwestern Health Resources**, the clinically integrated network formed by UT Southwestern and Texas Health Resources to provide coordinated care to the broad communities of North Texas, will continue to provide value to the North Texas community, including the coordination of care for nearly 100,000 Medicare beneficiaries in North Texas – more than any other Accountable Care Organization in North Texas and the fourth largest in the nation.

### **Business Affairs**

Having served as interim leader of the Business Affairs group the last few months since our former EVP for Business Affairs, Arnim Dontes, concluded his 10 years of service to UT Southwestern, I have had an even greater opportunity to see the dedication and work underway by the groups that support our day-to-day operations and activities on campus, including Accounting, Budget and Resource Planning, Contracts Management, Facilities Management, Financial Affairs, Auxiliary Services, Human Resources, Information Resources, Safety and Business Continuity, Sponsored Programs Administration, Supply Chain Management, and the University's Police Department. I want to note in particular the exceptional

efforts by our Facilities team led by Juan Guerra during last February's brutal winter storm to keep our campus safe and make it possible to continue our operations. As we finalize the national search for a new Executive Vice President of Business Affairs, I look forward to seeing the entire UT Southwestern community benefit from the priorities set by the Business Affairs team to enhance support for our entire institutional mission. Following appointment of our new EVP, we anticipate launching a national search for our Vice President for Human Resources. In the meantime, I am grateful that Dr. Marc Nivet, our Executive Vice President for Institutional Advancement, has stepped in to serve as Interim Vice President of HR and is catalyzing efforts to enhance the ability of our Human Resources colleagues to support the needs of a large and growing, complex organization.

With the continued growth of our research programs and the steady increase in the number of patients and their families who are seeking care at UT Southwestern, **maintaining progress on our major capital projects is essential**. We can anticipate the substantial completion of several capital projects in FY22, including the combined Peter O'Donnell Jr. Brain Institute/Simmons Cancer Center buildings as part of our Phase VI North Campus expansion as well as our expansive outpatient medical center at RedBird. We also hope to complete planning for a major renovation of the Zale Lipshy Pavilion and seek approval from our Board of Regents to proceed.

A major initiative for our Business Affairs colleagues this year is relocating operations currently taking place at the Paul M. Bass Administrative and Clinical Center on our North Campus so that this site can be redeveloped to support our long-term patient care and research priorities on campus. This will involve moving 72 departments and divisions, our data center, and more than 2,600 staff from the **Bass Center to new offices and clinical spaces at various sites** in the close vicinity of our campus.

Our commitment to **sustaining and enhancing employee engagement** will continue to be an institutional priority in this new year and into the horizon. The Executive Vice Presidents and I are pleased by the progress made in recent years, as evidenced by two years of rising scores on our Values in Practice Employee Engagement Survey. We will be monitoring the implementation of additional departmental and institutional action plans in FY22 intended to address issues identified as opportunities for improvement through the survey. We aim to ensure that UTSW provides an environment that makes it possible for every employee to achieve their full potential and fulfillment in their work life.

### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

In providing this overview of our institutional priorities, I want to emphasize once again that UT Southwestern is unequivocally committed to promoting diversity, providing equal opportunity, and prohibiting racial discrimination – and to sustaining a safe and secure environment for learning and working for all students, trainees, faculty, and staff. This commitment has led to critical conversations across campus in the last few years and, while there is exceptional work being done across our campus community to advance our efforts, we must lean in and assure that it permeates all aspects of what we do as an institution. This year, we will **launch a national search for a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO)**. This new executive will report directly to me and focus exclusively on diversity, inclusion, equity, and community engagement. The CDO will be responsible for identifying barriers that limit opportunity for any historically underrepresented groups on campus and proposing actions to help ensure that each

member of our community thrives and develops the cultural awareness and competency required to advance the mission of UT Southwestern.

**Concluding Comments**

I hope the institutional priorities outlined above help to provide clarity on some of our key goals as we set the direction of our campus and institution. I want to thank each of you for your contribution that made it possible for UT Southwestern to advance its mission and serve all of its stakeholders in the past year despite the extraordinary challenges presented by the pandemic. Your commitment to our institution and the talent you bring to work each day make me confident that we will maintain our same momentum in this new year. Whatever your role, you help make UT Southwestern's success possible.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.  
President, UT Southwestern