

UT Southwestern Medical Center

Message from President Podolsky

September 2, 2014

To the UT Southwestern Community:

As we begin the new academic year, I am writing to welcome those new to UT Southwestern – students, trainees, faculty, and staff – and to share some perspectives on the past year and the one ahead, which holds the exciting milestones of completing construction of the new William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital this month and opening it on November 15, 2014.

The past year included many events and developments that should be a source of satisfaction and pride to all members of the UT Southwestern community. We were thrilled to be able to celebrate the award of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine to Dr. Thomas Südhof for pioneering work he had done on synaptic transmission during the 25 years he was at UTSW. Now at Stanford University, he remains a member of our faculty as an Adjunct Professor of Neuroscience, and we are proud to consider him our sixth Nobel Laureate.

We also celebrated last year the election of Dr. Zhijian “James” Chen, Professor of Molecular Biology and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator, to the National Academy of Sciences for his pathbreaking work in advancing our understanding of innate immunity. With his election, UTSW now has 21 NAS members on the faculty, which places us nationally among the top group of academic medical centers.

As an expression of our commitment to be at the forefront of scientific research and clinical programs, we established several new departments and centers last year: a Department of Bioinformatics; a Department of Emergency Medicine; the [Texas Institute for Brain Injury and Repair](#), and the [Hamon Center for Regenerative Science and Medicine](#), which is being led by Dr. Eric Olson.

In addition, three new department chairs were recruited: Dr. Michael Choti, an internationally acclaimed surgical oncologist, came from Johns Hopkins University last fall to become Chair of the Department of Surgery; Dr. Deborah Diercks, a leading national figure in Emergency Medicine, has just arrived from the University of California, Davis, to chair our newly created Department of Emergency Medicine; and Dr. Kathleen Bell, a national leader in rehabilitation medicine with a research specialty in traumatic brain injury, will be moving from the University of Washington later this month to become chair of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

The Year Ahead

Looking ahead, we continue to be guided by the strategic priorities we have set to fulfill our missions of education, research, and patient care, and we now have a recently completed refresh of our Six-Year Plan that was generated with the input of many on the campus. We are grateful to be able to begin FY15 on a solid base of faculty accomplishments, a flourishing health system, and institutional fiscal strength.

Education. Our mission to educate and train the next generation of physicians and scientists is at the core of virtually everything we do, and a key educational priority for the year ahead is to complete implementation plans for the new curriculum commissioned by Dean and Provost Greg Fitz that the Medical School will begin offering to first year students next summer. The new curriculum was proposed and adopted this past year, following two years of a comprehensive review and needs assessment to reimagine our approaches, in order to ensure that our students are best prepared for the future they will encounter in the rapidly changing landscape of medicine and health care delivery.

The curriculum reform initiative was led by Drs. James Stull and Dennis Burns, and as first steps in implementation, we are well along in our efforts to renovate library space to accommodate the array of team-based learning activities that will be integral to the new curriculum. We have also begun planning for the inclusion of a Simulation Center in the first building that will be constructed as part of our West Campus Master Plan. (This Master Plan is for the space that will become available after St. Paul University Hospital is demolished in 2015.)

Research. In the research arena, faculty recipients will be moving forward with work supported by key grants awarded in FY14, which included a \$28.6 million renewal of our Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) to promote the rapid translation of basic laboratory findings into patient care; and the \$37 million that UTSW faculty received in grants from the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) in the first two rounds of funding when CPRIT resumed its grant award program in May 2014.

Despite our success with the CTSA and CPRIT, the increasingly competitive overall climate for research funding has created intense pressures on our research faculty and is truly a threat to our country's progress in conquering diseases that affect the quality of life for countless individuals. We will be enhancing our federal relations efforts in the year ahead to both lead and join others in working for better funding for research.

These heightened challenges make it more important than ever for us to ensure that our campus research infrastructure supports faculty efforts and needs as effectively and efficiently as possible. We recognize that and are committed to achieving it. We are also committed to the priority of providing adequate computing technology and power to meet faculty research needs.

Clinical Care. I encourage you to follow our [Clinical Quality and Safety website](#), which we

launched in January 2013 as a reflection of our commitment to transparency. We are proud of our local and national leadership in doing this, and the site has continued to expand as we have added new areas of quality measurement and tracking. With the move of Dr. Gary Reed, our first Chief Quality Officer, to the Medical School to be the first Associate Dean for Quality, Safety, and Outcomes Education, we are currently conducting a national search for a new Chief Quality Officer, which we hope to conclude shortly.

An important and exciting initiative for the year ahead will be the establishment of the UT Southwestern Brain Institute, which will encompass our academic and clinical programs in the neurosciences and highlight UTSW's national excellence in this area. The clinical centerpiece of the Brain Institute will be Zale Lipshy University Hospital, as it completes its transformation into a premier clinical center for neurosciences.

However, the pressure on funding for graduate medical education is a major concern, especially as the need for a larger physician workforce continues to grow. And just as we needed to revise and adapt our undergraduate medical education curriculum to prepare students for the changing external environment in which they will practice medicine, so we need to revise our graduate medical education training programs. Our trainees need to be prepared to deliver quality health care in ambulatory, as well as inpatient, settings, and they also need to be ready to practice medicine at a time of rapidly changing payment models, which are increasingly based on performance metrics and involve more financial risk for physicians.

Leadership Renewal. Another significant transformation in progress that will continue during FY15 is the generational renewal of academic leadership. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Greg Fitz, Dr. Bruce Meyer, Executive Vice President for Health System Affairs, and hundreds of hours spent by faculty who have served as chairs and members of search committees, 17 new department chairs and center directors have been recruited through national searches since 2010. Searches for five other new leaders are currently in progress, and two more are slated to begin this fall.

In addition, at the institutional level, we will be announcing very shortly the appointment of a new Vice President for Communications, Marketing, and Public Affairs, and a national search is in progress for a Vice President and Chief Information Officer.

2015 Legislative Session. A major priority for 2014-15 will be working with the Texas State Legislature to secure the best possible budget support for UTSW. We are already actively engaged in meeting with key legislators and making them aware of UTSW as an asset to all of Texas, and legislative activities will become an even higher priority when the Legislature convenes for its January-May 2015 biennial session. Although state revenues are substantially improved from a few years ago, there are also many needs for ensuring the overall future vitality of our state with its rapidly growing population.

Concluding Comments. The impending opening of Clements University Hospital is truly a transformational moment for UT Southwestern in the development of our health system and

for the citizens of Dallas and North Texas, who will now have the opportunity to receive high quality, innovative, and compassionate care in a state-of-the art facility designed first and foremost to meet the needs of patients and their families.

I encourage you to learn about the [new hospital](#) by reviewing the website, and you will be hearing shortly about a series of events planned for the end of October to give members of the UT Southwestern community and other stakeholders an opportunity to tour the hospital before it opens.

At the same time that we celebrate the completion of the new hospital and enjoy the excitement of its opening, we must also keep in mind the challenges we face in positioning UT Southwestern for continued – and indeed, even greater – success. The inherent complexity and multiplicity of changes in the external landscape of health care delivery (most notably, the need to redesign care delivery to achieve improved patient experiences, better health outcomes, and reduced costs) affect all three of our core missions as an academic medical center. We must understand the changes and be prepared to both adapt to them and to influence them, creatively and strategically.

We have a full, exciting, and challenging year ahead, and I look forward to the support and contributions of every member of the campus community as we work together to fulfill our commitment to creating, training, and delivering the future of medicine, today.

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