

UT News

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*****UT System Regents pick new president for UT Health Science Center

DALLAS--The University of Texas System Board of Regents chose Dr. Kern Wildenthal as next president of The UT Health Science Center at Dallas in a unanimous decision here July 12.

Wildenthal, who holds both M.D. and Ph.D degrees, has been dean of Southwestern Medical School at the health science center since 1980. He is an internationally recognized researcher with a distinguished career in cardiac physiology. He is also a strong academic leader and administrator, said UT System officials.

The new president replaces Dr. Charles C. Sprague who is retiring Aug. 31 after nearly 20 years as chief executive of the medical school and of the health science center.

In making the announcement, Board of Regents Chairman Jess Hay declared: "Dr. Wildenthal's achievements as a scientist and an educator left no doubt in the minds of the members of The Board of Regents that he is the top choice for this most important position.

"During Dr. Wildenthal's tenure as Dean of Medicine, The Southwestern Medical School has seen eight of its faculty members elected members of the National Academy of Science, with two of that number going on to win the first Nobel Prize in medicine awarded in Texas." Hay continued.

Wildenthal was chosen from a number of candidates submitted to the Board by a search committee chaired by UT Chancellor Hans Mark.

The 45-year-old Wildenthal becomes leader of an institution whose teaching, research and patient care operations total more than \$180 million a year.

Announcement of the presidential appointment was made during a special called session of the Board of Regents at the Fairmont Hotel here. The Board also honored Sprague by designating him "President Emeritus" of the Dallas health science center and by naming a planned structure "The Charles C. Sprague Clinical Sciences Building."

Wildenthal was one of the youngest persons ever appointed dean of a major medical school when he assumed duties at Southwestern in 1980 at the age of 38. He had been dean of the Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at the health science center for four years prior to that.

A native Texan (born in San Marcos), Wildenthal attended Sul Ross College in Alpine where his father, the late Dr. Bryan Wildenthal, was president.

Wildenthal took a B.A. in English literature while completing a pre-medical curriculum and was named as the outstanding student at Sul Ross in 1960. Later that same year he entered Southwestern Medical School and, upon graduating four years later, became an intern in internal medicine in Bellevue Hospital in New York. He then moved to a residency at Parkland Hospital in Dallas.

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In 1966 Wildenthal became a postdoctoral fellow in cardiology at Southwestern and two years later joined the National Heart Institute as guest scientist.

He went to England in the late 1960s to become a Special Research Fellow and visiting member of the scientific staff at Strangeways Research Laboratory in Cambridge. He took a Ph.D. in cell physiology from the University of Cambridge in 1970.

During this period, Wildenthal studied with a famous British scientist, Dame Honor Fell, at Strangeways. Wildenthal adapted her methods for culturing fetal tissue and, after returning to the United States, perfected a method of using isolated beating mouse hearts in culture for cardiology research.

In Dallas, Wildenthal rose to the rank of professor at Southwestern, then in 1975 was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and returned to Cambridge for a year as a visiting professor.

Wildenthal and his co-workers at Southwestern received inter-national attention during the 1970s when they devised a novel and effective way for slowing down runaway heart rates. The team discovered that patients with paroxysmal atrial tachycardia (PAT) could be treated safely and rapidly by immersing their faces in cold water. With this approach, the "diving reflex" reduced the rapid heart rates to normal.

Dr. Wildenthal's proven and excellent administrative leadership in two deanships at The U. T. Health Science Center at Dallas clearly signaled him as the choice for president of this outstanding University of Texas System institution, said UT System leaders.

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