

News

Office of Medical Information
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas

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*****Markey Trust gives UT Southwestern \$8.2 million for young scientists

DALLAS -- What if the best and brightest young scientists cannot find funding for their research? The future of medical science itself could be placed in jeopardy.

To help prevent that possibility and encourage the pursuit of medical research by the best trained minds in the country, the Lucille P. Markey Charitable Trust has granted The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center \$8.2 million to fund an innovative Program of Excellence in Postgraduate Research (PEPR).

"Even the most talented of young investigators can no longer be sure of obtaining financial support for their projects," said Dr. William Neaves, dean of UT Southwestern Medical School. "Too many of the nation's best students are discouraged from pursuing medical research careers."

Medical scientists going through M.D./Ph.D. programs spend six to eight years in medical and graduate school, four years as medical residents and several more as postdoctoral research fellows. After all those years, they compete with their peers and senior scientists for an ever-dwindling pool of federal and private grant money in order to conduct their own independent research.

UT Southwestern's PEPR program steps in at that crucial first stage of a research career following medical residency. Instead of a traditional postdoctoral research fellowship, the program offers an opportunity for independent research in a unique physical and intellectual environment. The young scientists will work in a new 7,500-square-foot research facility located in the Simmons Biomedical Research Building with the encouragement and advice of some of UT Southwestern's top scientists.

(More)

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Two or three fellows will be admitted to the program each year by open national competition. Selection will be based on the quality of research proposals, academic record and assessment by previous mentors. Each position will receive annual support of approximately \$130,000 a year to cover the researcher's salary, that of a technician, research supplies and other expenses. In addition, the Markey grant will provide laboratory equipment and core research facilities for use by the fellows.

"The PEPR concept is the next logical step after Ross Perot's initiative in supporting talented young people in careers in medical research," said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. In 1988 Mr. Perot gave UT Southwestern \$7 million over 10 years to underwrite the scholastic and living expenses of five to 10 M.D./Ph.D. candidates a year throughout medical and graduate school, in addition to another \$13 million to support the research of their faculty mentors.

The PEPR fellows will be able to seek advice and support from an executive committee of notable UT Southwestern scientists:

* **Dr. Joseph Sambrook**, director of Southwestern's Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development. Sambrook, who conceived the idea for PEPR, is chairman of its executive committee. He was previously responsible for the institution of a widely praised career development program for young Ph.D.s at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory on Long Island, N.Y. Sambrook's laboratories will be located on the same floor as the PEPR fellows'.

* **Drs. Joseph Goldstein and Michael Brown**, who won the 1985 Nobel Prize for their research on cholesterol metabolism. Goldstein is chairman of the Department of Molecular Genetics, and Brown is director of the Center for Genetic Diseases at UT Southwestern. They consider close interaction between basic scientists and clinicians to be one of UT Southwestern's major strengths.

* **Dr. Alfred Gilman**, chairman of the Department of Pharmacology. An M.D./Ph.D. himself, Gilman founded the M.D./Ph.D. program at the University of Virginia and has been active in UT Southwestern's Medical Scientist Training Program.

All four internationally respected scientists will be available to help and advise young M.D./Ph.D.s in independent research. They will also establish an Advisory Board, consisting of 10 to 12 eminent scientists drawn from the basic and clinical departments of UT Southwestern.

"Our goal is to provide an environment that is intellectually tough and stringent, and yet supportive and unobtrusive," said Sambrook.

That environment will come through interaction among PEPR fellows, the clinical departments with which they are associated, the advisors, and a program of varied formal and informal seminars, retreats and discussions that will form the core of the PEPR program.

"This program is an extremely important early step. The point is to allow young scientists to pursue their own ideas in basic research," said Brown. "One of the limitations of the conventional postdoctoral fellowship is that contact is limited to one faculty member. Here they will have access to any of our faculty members."

The \$8.2 million grant is the sixth largest single donation ever received by UT Southwestern.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.