

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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TWO SCIENTISTS APPOINTED TO CONGRESSIONALLY MANDATED COMMITTEES TO DETERMINE ALLOCATIONS OF RESEARCH FUNDS

DALLAS — April 29, 1998 – Two UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas investigators have been appointed to congressionally mandated committees that will help determine how funding is allocated for scientific research.

Dr. Roger Unger, director of the Gifford Laboratories for Diabetes Research, is one of 20 members of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Priority-Setting Process Committee. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) named the members after Congress requested a study on how the NIH determines where its public funding is distributed.

Dr. Christopher Newgard, professor of biochemistry and internal medicine, has been appointed to the Diabetes Research Working Group of the NIH's National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). Congressional appropriation subcommittees directed formation of such a committee to prepare a comprehensive plan for all NIH-funded diabetes-research efforts.

"Both of these committees and their reports are vitally important to scientists, especially in light of President Clinton's proposed 1999 research and development budget, which gives the NIH and the National Science Foundation the largest dollar increase ever," said Unger, holder of the Touchstone/West Distinguished Chair in Diabetes Research.

"The NIH will have to determine how to allocate all these additional dollars, especially if the money from the tobacco settlement is directed toward science and technology," Unger said. "Our job is to recommend the best ways of deciding how to divide those funds."

Unger's committee is charged with studying the factors and criteria NIH uses for funding allocations; how funding decisions are made; how the public can have input on allocations; and the impact of congressional-statutory directives on research funding. The panel's findings and

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recommendations will be summarized in a report that the IOM will submit to the Senate Appropriations and Commerce committees and the House Appropriations Committee by July 2.

Newgard's committee will consider the direction of diabetes research based on available funding. The panel will then develop for Congress a comprehensive plan for determining how much money should go to different areas of diabetes research. Their plan will become part of the U.S. Senate's 1998 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, S1061.

"There has been a significant improvement in the level of funding for diabetes research in the past three years," said Newgard, holder of the Gifford O. Touchstone Jr. and Randolph G. Touchstone Distinguished Chair in Diabetes Research. "It's our job to try to prioritize important research objectives and look for ways to encourage creativity in the field."

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