UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER NEWS

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# New clinical trials network for neurological disorders helps UT Southwestern evaluate cutting-edge treatments

DALLAS – Sept. 13, 2012 – UT Southwestern Medical Center's expertise in neurology has earned it a place in an innovative national clinical trials network that will make it easier to test promising treatments for patients with brain, muscle and nerve disorders.

UT Southwestern, one of 25 sites selected for the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke's (NINDS) new Network for Excellence in Neuroscience Clinical Trials, is the only participating medical center in Texas and its bordering states.

The network, known as NeuroNEXT, represents a unique model of clinical trials for brain diseases. By creating a shared infrastructure and institutional review board, institute officials said they expect to minimize the time and expense of studies while making new treatments available to patients more quickly.

"We want to bring the fruits of discovery in the laboratory as quickly as we can to the patients who need them," said Dr. Mark Goldberg, chairman of neurology and neurotherapeutics at UT Southwestern and a co-principal investigator for the project. "It is more efficient to have a well-organized team in place, allowing us to test one therapy after the next."

UT Southwestern is expected to receive $1.4 million in NINDS support over the next seven years for its role in the network.

Dr. Petra Kaufmann, the NINDS' associate director for clinical research, said UT Southwestern was an excellent candidate for NeuroNEXT because of the medical center's breadth of multidisciplinary expertise across the subspecialties of neurology, neurological surgery and neuroradiology for pediatrics and adults. She also cited the medical center's clinical research experience and access to a large patient population.

"An important piece was the strength in the coordination and collaboration of the investigators," Dr. Kaufmann said. "UT Southwestern also is built on solid basic science enterprise and has translational research capacity. This really was a very good fit."

NeuroNEXT's first clinical trial is designed to identify biomarkers for spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a motor-neuron disease that causes progressive weakness and respiratory disease. It is the most common genetic cause of death in infants, and those with the most aggressive form of the

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disease often die before they are 2 years old. There currently is no effective treatment or cure.

UT Southwestern's participation in the trial includes Dr. Susan Iannaccone, a NeuroNEXT co-principal investigator who treats one of the nation's largest populations of spinal muscular atrophy patients. In 2000, she set up one of the disease's first national clinical trial groups, which was expanded from five sites to 15 through two rounds of funding from the National Institutes of Health.

Although successful, that earlier network required expensive and time-consuming planning and execution, said Dr. Iannaccone, professor of pediatrics and of neurology and neurotherapeutics at UT Southwestern. Centralizing those efforts through NeuroNEXT, she said, will allow investigators to focus on research and treatment.

"This means the future is brighter for our patients," said Dr. Iannaccone, who also is director of pediatric neurology at Children's Medical Center. "The faster you can test drugs, the faster you can find out if they work."

Visit http://www.utsouthwestern.edu/research/fact/index.html for more information about clinical trials at UT Southwestern.

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