

OCTOBER 23, 1980

CONTACT: Ann Harrell
Office: (214) 688-3404
Home: (214) 369-2695

* * * * Masters to head M.D./Ph.D. program for
medical scientists

DALLAS--Dr. Bettie Sue Masters, 12-year faculty member at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, will become the new director of the UTHSCD Medical Scientist Training Program in spring, 1981. Dr. Masters' appointment to the directorship of the program which leads to both M.D. and Ph.D. degrees, was recently announced by Dr. William B. Neaves, dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. Dr. Masters holds appointments as both professor of biochemistry and research professor of surgery at the Dallas school.

Dr. Jean Wilson, professor of internal medicine and original director of the program which was started in 1977, will continue as program head until next spring. The transition will be gradual, says Wilson. "Actually, Dr. Masters and I have already begun working together."

The M.D./Ph.D. program, says Neaves, was designed to prepare motivated students for careers in academic medicine. "Some of the brightest college students in the state are interested in both biomedical research and clinical practice. The Medical Scientist Training Program provides an efficient route for attainment of their objectives.

"We believe this program offers an unexcelled opportunity to accommodate their interests in biomedical research in a setting which also provides the best in clinical training. The M.D./Ph.D. program will play an important role in the future of this institution. It exemplifies the great strength of this health science center, namely, mutually beneficial integration of the basic and clinical sciences."

The six-year program, which currently has 12 young scientists enrolled, grants Ph.D. degrees in biochemistry, cell biology, immunology, microbiology, pharmacology and physiology. The first two years, which overlap with the medical school curriculum, are devoted to advanced studies in the basic sciences. The next two years are devoted to scientific research and work on the dissertation, required for the basic-science doctorate. During the last part of the program, the students are trained in clinical medicine.

"These students do not fail to experience the same rigorous clinical training that they would receive were they in the M.D. program exclusively," says Neaves. "Nor is their special research training for the Ph.D. degree diluted in any way."

Neaves says Wilson has played an invaluable role in the development of the program. "Without Jean's taking the helm three years ago, there is a real question whether the program would have flourished on this campus.

"It was important that a clinician like Jean Wilson, whose own work represents the best integration of science and medicine, should believe in this program and feel that it adds a new and important dimension to the educational mission of our institution. Without Jean's enthusiastic effort, the program would have had trouble gaining credibility here."

At this time, says Neaves, Wilson believes it is important for someone with extensive experience in Ph.D. training to take over the direction of the program. Wilson will, however, continue to be heavily involved in the program after he turns the administration over to Masters.

"Since its inception, Jean has been very concerned with the welfare of this program. There is no question that he really loves it. Because he believes it is important for clinicians to counsel and advise students and to share insights with them, he will remain closely involved."

Masters, says Neaves, was both his and Wilson's first choice to take over the leadership of the program.

"Bettie Sue is a superb choice. Like Jean, she is also an excellent role model for these students. An outstanding research scientist who has capitalized on the unique opportunities offered by the health science center environment, she extended her own basic research program in biochemistry to include clinically important research in the area of burn trauma in collaboration with Dr. Charles Baxter's group in the Department of Surgery. She stands in the best tradition of this institution as an effective link between the basic and clinical sciences."

Masters' work in metabolism involving drugs, carcinogens, steroids and prostaglandins has recently gained her an invitation to be one of a small group of U.S. scientists to participate in a joint U.S.-China scientific conference, believed to be the first of its kind. Topic for this May, 1981 meeting will be "Proteins in Biology and Medicine."

Her primary interest in biochemistry is the study of specific enzymes which carry out the metabolism of a variety of compounds, some of which are essential to life, as well as the metabolism of foreign compounds, such as drugs.

In the burn area, Masters is working with Baxter and others in biochemistry and surgery on a joint research project involving white blood cells. She was responsible for bringing Dr. Michio Nakamura, a leukocyte expert from Japan, to the health science center to work with her in this area. These researchers, along with Dr. Richard Okita, are looking for answers to what goes wrong with the immune system when there is burn trauma. They feel that evidence points to the patient's own plasma.

During her first five years at UTHSCD, Masters was an Established Investigator of the American Heart Association. She was named professor in 1976. She is a graduate of Roanoke College in Virginia and Duke University, where she received her Ph.D. While at Duke she also completed a postdoctoral fellowship, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, and received an Advanced Research Fellowship funded by the American Heart Association.

While at UTHSCD, the scientist has served as president of the Faculty Senate, chairperson of the campus Committee of Delegates and of the Faculty Seminar. Masters has also served on a number of national committees and an NIH study section.

##

TEAR SHEETS APPRECIATED