

News

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January 14, 1988

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****PEROT FOUNDATION PLEDGES \$20 MILLION
TO UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER
For medical scientist training
and biomedical research

DALLAS -- The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas today announced that the Perot Foundation is providing \$20 million over the next 10 years to train medical scientists and to augment programs in biomedical research.

H. Ross Perot, Dallas businessman and education advocate, said: "I am making this gift to enable Southwestern to achieve greatness in broader areas of medical research and to enable it to train the next generation of medical scientists."

The support, which will be in addition to funds received from other public and private sources, falls into four areas: additional support of Nobel Laureates Michael Brown's and Joseph Goldstein's research on cholesterol metabolism and genetics; support to augment research involving genetic approaches to other major medical problems; support to train outstanding pre-doctoral researchers; and support to train postdoctoral researchers.

In announcing the gift, Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern, said, "This innovative gift will provide important additional support to Goldstein and Brown and to other promising scientists whose work in genetics expands upon and complements theirs. It also ensures the next generation of Goldsteins and Browns by removing the considerable financial obstacle that has deterred the brightest students from pursuing medical research careers."

Perot concurred: "This is an investment in people and in intellect that will bring enormous rewards in the years to come. These funds will help train young scientists who might well make the important medical breakthroughs of the future."

The Perot gift will allow UT Southwestern's Medical Scientist Training Program, which now has 26 students and an entry rate of five a year, to expand to a total of 90 or more students and have an entry rate of 15 a year.

The Medical Scientist Training Program is a rigorous six- or seven-year program of study that culminates in the award of both M.D. and Ph.D. degrees. The new program, which will be phased in over several years, not only will allow admission of 15 new students a year in the MSTP but also will support a five-year postdoctoral training program that each year will recruit two or more outstanding fellows who already have completed their medical training. Perot will fully fund five MSTP students and two postdoctoral fellows each year. UT Southwestern will seek funds to match that number.

Provision of highly competitive stipends for the students and postgraduate trainees will make UT Southwestern's program one of the country's most competitive.

The pre-doctoral students will receive full tuition scholarships, plus escalating annual stipends that begin at \$12,000 the first two years, move to \$15,000 and \$16,000 in years three and four, and reach \$17,000 and \$18,000 in years five and six.

Postdoctoral students will receive supplements up to \$25,000, in addition to the usual postgraduate stipends of \$20,000 and \$25,000.

New students in the programs will be selected on the basis of merit and research potential by a faculty group headed by Drs. Brown and Goldstein.

(More)

Director of the pre-doctoral program is Dr. Jean Wilson, a noted endocrinologist and member of the National Academy of Sciences.

At the time when medical science is exploding with advances and opportunities, the United States is at risk of losing its pre-eminence in science because of our inability to attract the very brightest students into this exciting realm, noted Laureate Goldstein. "Now we will be able to recruit these students and provide them with the financial resources to complete their study free of debt.

"Science is more exciting today than it ever has been because we have incredibly powerful techniques. The challenge is to ask the right questions, and that's one of the reasons for educating an M.D./Ph.D. He or she is given a perspective that is unique in the sense of learning the biology and also the pathology -- how the biology gets disturbed -- and if one has the right imagination, then one can understand these processes on a molecular level."

One ultimate product of this understanding might be "new drugs that you never even thought of before," Dr. Goldstein concluded.

An example of this is the newly approved drug lovastatin, which reduces cholesterol by blocking an enzyme. The mechanism of this enzyme was described in the work that won the Nobel Prize for Drs. Brown and Goldstein.

"These M.D./Ph.D. students not only will be future researchers but will be pacesetters in school, and many will become teachers," according to Nobel Laureate Brown. "We'll create better doctors for the state by having these students because they will disseminate their energy and enthusiasms to the rest of the students, and that mix will be of tremendous benefit."

In addition to the funds committed to the MSTP and postdoctoral programs, the Perot Foundation will provide about \$1.3 million annually to support research projects.

The first project involves research in cholesterol metabolism and genetics centered around Brown and Goldstein's work. This grant will allow them to pursue the mechanisms (technically called promoters) that control cholesterol at the genetic level. This will include study of the molecular "switches" that turn on and off the genes that control cholesterol. The goal of this work is the eventual control of cholesterol in the body, thereby attacking cardiovascular disease, the main cause of death in Americans.

Half of the money will support a second program of research in the application of molecular genetics to other types of human disease. This will include a search for potentially important biologic "switches" that regulate cellular function in a variety of diseases. For the immediate future, research into the genetic and molecular mechanisms of diabetes, kidney disease, prostate disease and transmission of messages in the brain and nervous system will be emphasized.

These research efforts will involve several current faculty members in various disciplines. Among the senior investigators whose work will be involved are Dr. Jean Wilson, endocrinologist, and Dr. Alfred Gilman, chairman of the Department of Pharmacology. Both are members of the National Academy of Sciences. In addition, new faculty can be recruited as a result of the Perot commitment.

Perot concluded, "I am making this investment here because I believe UT Southwestern in Dallas is the only institution in this part of the country that has the capability of becoming the best of its kind in the world in the next few years. It is my hope that these funds will help it achieve that potential.

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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.