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News

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****Dallas financier to fund arthritis research.**

DALLAS--Dallas financier Harold Simmons is giving \$7.5 million over the next 10 years to establish one of the world's top arthritis research and training centers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas.

Announcement of the huge gift was made by Dr. Charles C. Sprague, UTHSCD president, at a press conference Monday, April 18, following approval by The University of Texas System Board of Regents.

The Harold C. Simmons Arthritis Research Center will encompass an existing and widely recognized core of arthritis experts headed by Dr. Morris Ziff at the health science center.

Simmons, head of the billion-dollar Contran Corporation, is a victim of ankylosing spondylitis, a form of arthritis that affects the back and spine. The Simmons' family foundation will finance the new arthritis center at the rate of \$62,500 a month for 10 years.

Specific aim of the bequest is to fund basic research into the nature of the crippling and disfiguring ailment that has plagued mankind since antiquity.

"I hope there may be some progress toward understanding the functions of this disease," Simmons says. "Obviously, we'd all like a cure, but I'd be happy with any progress toward curing any part of arthritis--any small cure or medication to alleviate symptoms."

President Sprague noted the value of basic or fundamental research as opposed to applied research:

"You're not just treating symptoms--you're going at the basic mechanisms of the disease. It's a long and arduous task but there's a tremendous potential for a payoff to end a lot of human suffering."

The new Simmons Arthritis Center will build on the Rheumatic Diseases Unit, which was established at The UT Health Science Center in 1958. During the 25 years of its existence, the unit has been recognized as a world leader in research and training of young scientists. Members of the unit have published 298 scientific reports, and 101 rheumatologists have been trained here. Of the latter number, 59 now work in the United States and 42 work in Japan, India, China, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Mexico, Great Britain, Switzerland, Ireland, Belgium, France, Italy, West Germany, the Scandanavian countries, Greece and Israel.

In fact, the UT center already has trained more faculty members who do teaching and research than any other such unit in the country.

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Sprague also announced plans to appoint a distinguished board of scientific advisors to guide research programs at the center. For the time being, research programs will be concentrated in three areas:

First will be the research program carried on by Ziff, who is Ashbel Smith professor, Morris Ziff Professor of Rheumatology and who will be director of the Simmons Center.

Second focal area will be research programs of five other full-time faculty members, and third will be research programs of investigators not currently affiliated.

In addition, a number of international scientific meetings are planned on ankylosing spondylitis and related ailments.

The 51-year-old Simmons, whose bouts with ankylosing spondylitis sometimes cause him to take medication in the small hours of the morning, was a basketball player at The University of Texas in Austin.

He was, in fact, a member of the Southwest Conference Champion team of 1951, which was coached by Jack Gray. (Another of Gray's athletes was Dr. Denton Cooley, the noted Houston heart surgeon.)

Not only was Simmons an athlete in college, but he also was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, an organization of top scholastic performers. He received a B.A. in 1951 and an M.A. in 1952, both in the field of economics.

After work in civil service and at a bank, Simmons bought University Drug near SMU and later built a chain of 100 stores. His financial dealings in airline, insurance and a number of other properties have brought him considerable media attention.

Simmons expresses the intention to become a creative philanthropist through his family foundation.

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