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UT Southwestern earns \$34 million NIH grant to foster patient-oriented research

DALLAS – Sept. 18, 2007 – UT Southwestern Medical Center will receive \$34 million from the National Institutes of Health to lead a wide-ranging collaborative initiative aimed at speeding the transfer of laboratory discoveries to new therapies that improve human health.

The five-year grant announced today by the NIH establishes the North and Central Texas Clinical and Translational Science Initiative (NCTCTSI). The UT Southwestern-based collaboration includes several regional academic institutions, hospitals and community partners.

The NIH also awarded grants to 11 other academic health centers nationwide as part of the agency's highly competitive Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) program. The program, which began last year with the awarding of the first 12 CTSA grants, is an NIH Roadmap for Medical Research initiative that links CTSA institutions in a consortium to energize patient-oriented research and translational science.

“As the consortium grows, we are fulfilling our charge to transform clinical and translational research,” said Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, director of the NIH. “Through collaboration and leadership, these sites are serving as discovery engines that can rapidly translate research into prevention strategies and clinical treatments for the people who need them. The CTSA consortium also represents our investment in the future as it prepares the next generation of clinical researchers to meet tomorrow’s health-care challenges.”

The UT Southwestern initiative will carry out several key functions, including: improved design of patient-oriented, or clinical, research studies; recruiting top investigators to UT Southwestern and the region; education, training and mentoring of the next generation of young clinical researchers and physicians; and expanding outreach efforts to medically underserved communities.

These efforts are aimed at accelerating the translation of basic-science findings to the patient’s bedside, said Dr. Milton Packer, chairman of clinical sciences at UT Southwestern and principal investigator for the NCTCTSI.

“This recognition by the NIH represents a major institutional achievement and catapults

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UT Southwestern into a hierarchy of medical schools recognized for excellence in clinical research,” said Dr. Packer. “Our world-class physicians treat complex medical cases and train the next generation of doctors. They’re at the forefront of discovering new clues to cure disease. Designation as a CTSA institution will attract the best and brightest young clinical investigators to UT Southwestern and the region and will contribute to a thriving environment for clinical research.”

Dr. Alfred Gilman, executive vice president, provost and dean of UT Southwestern Medical School, said the grant will provide expanded resources, equipment and facilities to clinical investigators, enabling them to perform at exceptional levels.

“Clinical research is very hard to do, much harder than basic research,” Dr. Gilman said. “In the laboratory, you can control nearly every variable, whereas in patient-based research you can’t. Every patient is different, you can only ask a handful of questions, and there are many regulations and ethical guidelines to follow. It can take years to do a single study.

“But the payoff for doing clinical research, and doing it well, with highly trained professionals and cutting-edge technology, can be measured in lives and improved health. The ultimate beneficiary is the patient.”

Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern, said: “This program is a superb example of how an academic medical center provides resources and opportunities that benefit an entire region and help a multitude of health-care and hospital facilities. The award of this grant to UT Southwestern verifies our rapid progress in becoming a national referral center for clinical care.”

Some of the key functions that CTSA institutions, including UT Southwestern and its collaborators, are expected to perform include:

- Developing better design for clinical trials;
- Educating, training and mentoring the next generation of clinical investigators;
- Designing new and improved informatics tools for clinical research;
- Expanding outreach efforts to medically underserved communities, including minorities and children;
- Assembling interdisciplinary teams across a wide range of research areas,

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including basic biology, nursing, dentistry, biomedical engineering, genomics and population sciences; and

- Forging new partnerships with private and public health-care organizations.

More than 200 established clinical and translational investigators are involved in the UT Southwestern-based program. The group's focus will be on fostering interactions among many disciplines, including allopathic and osteopathic medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, public health, engineering and computer science. The participating institutions have been working together since 2005 through previous NIH support to integrate educational, training and career development programs in clinical and translational research.

Collaborating academic institutions are UT Southwestern Medical School, UT Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M Health Science Center's Baylor College of Dentistry, UT Austin School of Nursing, University of North Texas Health Sciences Center, Texas Tech School of Pharmacy, UT Dallas School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences, UT Health Science Center at Houston's School of Public Health (regional campus in Dallas), and the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science at UT Dallas.

Collaborating hospitals and community partners include Parkland Memorial Hospital, Children's Medical Center Dallas, UT Southwestern University Hospitals, Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas, Cooper Institute, and MedTrials, Inc.

A key component of the new project will be to establish a General Clinical Research Center at Children's. The facility will provide clinical research infrastructure to investigators who focus on children's health issues. A GCRC provides resources to create a controlled environment for research patients. Clinical studies carried out at the GCRC will lead to improved understanding of diseases, allow better methods of diagnosis and treatment, foster interdisciplinary collaboration and offer training in clinical investigation.

"Partnering with institutions and organizations in the region provides expertise in specialty fields that not only will enhance the clinical research enterprise at UT Southwestern but also will improve our

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ability to provide advanced clinical care to important segments of our community, including children,” Dr. Wildenthal said.

The CTSA grants are administered by the National Center for Research Resources, a component of the NIH. Other awardees this year are: Case Western Reserve University; Emory University, partnering with Morehouse School of Medicine; Johns Hopkins University; University of Chicago; University of Iowa; University of Michigan; University of Washington in Seattle; University of Wisconsin-Madison; Vanderbilt University, partnering with Meharry Medical College; Washington University in St. Louis; and Weill Medical College of Cornell University, partnering with Hunter College.

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