

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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NEW DIRECTOR TO BRING INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO EPILEPSY CENTER

DALLAS — May 1, 1995 — A variety of promising new medications and increasingly successful surgical approaches are evidence physicians are making great strides in counteracting the debilitating effects of epilepsy, says the new director of the comprehensive epilepsy center at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

After spending six years as a staff neurologist at Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Ohio, Dr. Paul C. Van Ness is joining the UT Southwestern faculty. He plans to help create an innovative and comprehensive epilepsy treatment and research program for all age groups.

UT Southwestern expanded its epilepsy treatment services last year by opening a new 11-bed state-of-the-art monitoring unit in Parkland Memorial Hospital. Van Ness said the equipment, the resources and the well-respected faculty members already on board at UT Southwestern attracted him to Dallas. The six epilepsy specialists also see patients at Children's Medical Center of Dallas and Zale Lipshy University Hospital.

The next few years are expected to produce more breakthroughs in the battle to control and overcome epilepsy, a disorder that affects about 1 percent of the U.S. population. Advances during recent years have led to three new drugs for epilepsy, and several others are expected soon.

"Epilepsy patients should know that doctors now may be able to offer new alternatives if they've had trouble in the past with the side effects of their epilepsy medications or the medicine hasn't worked in controlling their seizures," Van Ness said. "Our goal is to control seizures in patients so they can drive, work and improve their quality of life."

Van Ness intends to increase the focus on surgical methods that can reduce or eliminate seizures for certain types of epilepsy. UT Southwestern neurosurgeons currently perform procedures on epilepsy patients, but Van Ness said he will modify the presurgical evaluations. "The surgery alternative has become more attractive because we're trying harder now to tailor

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EPILEPSY DIRECTOR — 2

the operations to the specific patient's situation," he said.

Improved neuroimaging allows neurologists to get a clearer picture of the brain region that generates seizures, thus allowing more precise surgical targeting.

He said the diverse and impressive training backgrounds of UT Southwestern's epilepsy faculty encourage new ideas and better patient care. He also expects to work on research and treatment projects with the neurological surgery, neuropsychology, neuroradiology and neuropathology faculties.

As director, Van Ness also intends to make public education a priority, seeking to teach ways to prevent or control epilepsy.

"Paul Van Ness is an outstanding, nationally recognized physician and investigator. He will lead the epilepsy team at UT Southwestern and its affiliated hospitals as it develops new treatments for patients with epilepsy and new programs for the comprehensive evaluation and management of these patients," said Dr. S. Clifford Schold Jr., chairman of neurology and holder of the Dorothy Rogers Cullum Distinguished Chair in Neuro-Oncology. "We are very enthusiastic about his arrival."

Van Ness earned his medical degree at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Medicine after receiving a bachelor of science degree from the University of California, Riverside. He performed his medical internship at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and served a neurology residency at UCLA. He completed an epilepsy/EEG fellowship at UCLA. He was director of the UCLA Adult Seizure Clinic and the UCLA Outpatient Sleep Disorders Clinic until moving to Cleveland in 1988.

Van Ness' research interests include study and treatment of focal, especially neocortical, epilepsy.

Epilepsy can be caused by tumors, head trauma, and congenital or developmental disorders. A comprehensive evaluation is often successful at pinpointing the specific etiology, prognosis and best treatment. Seizures are brought on by a sudden, brief malfunction of the brain's electrical activity. When a person is experiencing an epileptic seizure, he or she may lose consciousness, suffer uncontrollable body movements or just have a momentary impression that things taste, sound or look differently than normal.

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