

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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LEADING TRANSPLANT SURGEON SELECTED TO HEAD KIDNEY TRANSPLANT PROGRAM AT UT SOUTHWESTERN

DALLAS — August 23, 1996 — After years as a cancer surgeon, Dr. Shujun Li came to a turning point in his career about eight years ago. Should he continue down the same path, or move into another area of medicine?

He found his answer in organ transplant medicine. "Within the last 20 years we have begun to succeed with organ transplant surgeries," Li said. He is particularly fond of this area of surgery because it allows him to reconstruct a patient's body with techniques that have been shown to work.

For Li, the newly appointed surgical director of the kidney and pancreas transplant program and an associate professor of GI/endocrine surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, transplant surgery is a coalescence of compassion, philosophy and the practical side of medicine. "I think transplants are a true miracle and represent a new era for surgeons because we're giving something back to the patient instead of just taking out."

Li came to UT Southwestern in early July from the organ transplant program at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine. UT Southwestern, he said, offered an opportunity to enhance a well-respected kidney and pancreas transplant program.

Li anticipates expanding the transplant program. He has a special interest in transplantation of pancreas islet cells, which may be the final cure for diabetes. Islet cells are the workhorses that produce insulin in the pancreas, but transplanting them has not been very successful so far.

"Although we haven't been really successful in transplanting islet cells, it makes sense to do it because they are what diabetic patients need," Li said. He foresees success coming within the next five years.

"Right now in Dallas, pancreas transplant programs are small," said Li, who first

(MORE)

LEADING SURGEON — 2

came to the United States in 1980 as a visiting physician from China. "My goal is to put us in the top 10 in the nation, and if you do more than 20 pancreas transplants a year, that is possible.

"I came to UT Southwestern because there is a strong referral base of patients who can benefit from kidney and pancreas transplants," he said. "The endocrinology and nephrology divisions at the medical center are really strong."

But the driving force behind his decision to pursue transplant medicine remains a compassion for those who need them.

"No matter what the cause was for the organ to fail, the bottom line is that the patient needs another organ, and now it's entirely possible to prolong people's lives with organ transplants," Li said. "And that is why I got into this type of medicine."

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