

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Media Contact: Morgan Lyons  
(214) 648-3404  
or E-Mail: mlyons@mednet.swmed.edu

## UT SOUTHWESTERN ESTABLISHES DEPARTMENT OF MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND ONCOLOGY, REORGANIZES BIOCHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT

DALLAS — August 26, 1996 — UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas will establish a new Department of Molecular Biology and Oncology and reorganize its Department of Biochemistry as it names a new chairman effective Sept. 1.

Dr. Steven L. McKnight will serve as chairman of the reorganized biochemistry department and Dr. Eric N. Olson will become chairman of the new molecular biology and oncology department. McKnight holds the Sam G. Winstead and F. Andrew Bell Distinguished Chair in Biochemistry along with a Distinguished Chair in Basic Biomedical Research. Olson is director of the Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Center for Basic Research in Cancer and holds the Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Distinguished Chair in Basic Cancer Research.

"Dividing the former Department of Biochemistry into two separate departments reflects the rapid growth of molecular biology and the renewed importance of chemistry to the genetic revolution that will transform medicine," said Dr. William B. Neaves, dean of Southwestern Medical School and holder of the Doris and Bryan Wildenthal Professorship. "These changes, together with the new leadership of Drs. McKnight and Olson, position the institution for continued growth in these fruitful fields of research."

McKnight wants to expand the focus of the biochemistry department. "We plan to put an emphasis on chemistry and an examination of small molecules that act as biological regulators," he said. "My gut feeling is that chemistry is going to have a big impact on biology and medicine during the next 10 years."

Olson said those moves "complement the interests of our molecular biology and oncology department in pursuing genetic approaches to understanding cell growth and differentiation. Since cancer results from the disruption of these normal cellular events, this

(MORE)

## DEPARTMENT CHANGES — 2

type of research will undoubtedly yield important insights into the molecular events leading to cancer."

Olson and McKnight agreed that close collaboration and interaction between the two departments is important. "It is clear that future advances in understanding development and human disease will rely on a combination of genetics and chemistry," Olson said.

McKnight, an El Paso native, earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Texas at Austin and his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, both in biology. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences. Five years ago, he formed a biotech company, Tularik, with two other scientists. Based in San Francisco, the private firm's aim is to discover drugs that turn various genes on and off. The treatments will target a wide variety of diseases, among them cardiovascular problems, asthma and cancer.

"I very much like the attitude that UT Southwestern has; they encourage people to have significant interaction with pharmaceutical and biotech companies," McKnight said. "I think that helps translate basic research into practical applications that help create jobs in this country and help create value for our work and economic competitiveness." McKnight plans to travel to San Francisco each month for meetings with colleagues at Tularik.

Olson came to UT Southwestern in December 1995 from the UT M. D. Anderson Comprehensive Cancer Center at Houston. He serves on review and advisory committees for a number of organizations, including the National Cancer Institute, the American Heart Association, the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the National Institutes of Health. He is editor-in-chief of the journal *Developmental Biology*, and serves on the boards of other scientific publications.

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