

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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SOUTHWESTERN ALLIED HEALTH NAMES NEW PHYSICAL THERAPY CHAIR

DALLAS - September 1, 1994 - Dr. Patricia Winchester, the new chairwoman of The University of Texas Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School's Department of Physical Therapy, plans to focus more attention on research and the development of creative, new therapeutic techniques.

Winchester, who earned her Ph.D. at UT Southwestern in 1991, has been an assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery for two years. She will maintain a joint appointment as an orthopaedic surgery faculty member and as research director of the Mobility Research and Assessment Laboratory, housed in the Healthsouth Dallas Rehabilitation Institute at 9713 Harry Hines Blvd. The laboratory is a joint venture between UT Southwestern and the rehabilitation institute. Dr. Winchester and her colleagues at the lab conduct research related to the rehabilitation of individuals with spinal cord or traumatic brain injury.

"Dr. Winchester brings great enthusiasm and a wealth of ideas to this position," said Dr. Gordon Green, dean of the allied health school. "Besides having a proven track record in research, she also is very interested in the teaching aspect of the position."

Along with a vow to make UT Southwestern's physical therapy program one of the nation's most respected, comes Winchester's pledge to continue her research. She is currently involved in training patients to use the Parastep System, a neuromuscular-stimulator device that allows some paraplegic patients to stand and walk short distances.

The chairmanship in physical therapy has been vacant for a year and a half.

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Winchester said she sees her joint appointment as a further opportunity to integrate the work done in allied health with the research conducted by Southwestern Medical School. The medical school, allied health school and Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences make up The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

Winchester said she relishes the idea of working side-by-side with other physical therapists again and envisions a more "problem-based" curriculum for students of the future. "There are no recipes available to physical therapists," she said. "You have to look at each patient as an individual and figure out what is best for him or her."

A top priority for Winchester is the transformation of the current bachelor's degree physical-therapy program to a master's degree curriculum. The knowledge base and technical capabilities are expanding rapidly in the field of physical therapy, making graduate education necessary to many professionals.

In order to attract graduate students and additional faculty, research opportunities must be available, she said. The new accessibility of the Mobility Research and Assessment Laboratory to physical-therapy students should raise the level of research and encourage creative problem solving. Besides orthopaedics, collaborations also exist with biomedical engineering and internal medicine. With this new affiliation, Dr. Winchester said she hopes to expand the collaborative efforts in the future.

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