

# **SOUTHWESTERN NEWS**

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## **UT SOUTHWESTERN'S LANDMARK DALLAS HEART DISEASE PREVENTION PROJECT AIMS TO REDUCE HEART DEATHS IN DALLAS COUNTY**

DALLAS – April 11, 2000 – Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of Americans and is claiming Dallas County residents at a higher rate than the national average. In an effort to curb the trend, researchers at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are undertaking a bold project that puts the entire county under a microscope in a search for answers.

The Dallas Heart Disease Prevention Project, conducted by UT Southwestern in collaboration with the American Heart Association, will survey 15,000 Dallas County residents selected randomly. Residents will be asked to participate in confidential in-house health interviews, provide blood and urine samples, and undergo heart-imaging tests. The participants will be paid for their participation and all tests – valued at more than \$2,000 – will be conducted free of charge.

This survey is unique in its magnitude and is the first heart-disease prevention survey of a multiethnic population in a single metropolitan area.

"This study is unprecedented in the detail and sophistication of the measurements we will make with respect to genes, blood constituents, body-fat distribution, the size and shape of the heart, and the extent of disease in blood vessels of the heart," said Dr. R. Sanders Williams, director of UT Southwestern's Donald W. Reynolds Cardiovascular Clinical Research Center.

Because the study will include a cross section of ethnic groups, it may provide new insight as to why the number of minorities claimed by heart disease is disproportionately high.

Most earlier heart disease studies focused on white males, and those results do not accurately reflect the risk of heart disease in minorities or in women. Researchers hope to close the gap in the incidence of and deaths from heart disease between different ethnic communities.

"Dallas has more women who die from heart disease each year than almost any other city of this size," said Dr. Ronald Victor, medical director of the Dallas Heart Disease Prevention Project and chief of hypertension at UT Southwestern. "African-Americans shoulder an excessive burden of heart disease and stroke, and these problems are also on the rise in our growing Latino community."

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City and county officials lauded the study and encouraged citizens to participate.

"To get a chance to participate in a study like this at no cost is one I'd jump at," said Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk.

Dallas County Judge Lee Jackson said, "Someone among us may be the secret link in discovering what we don't know about heart disease. So everyone who's asked to participate might actually represent a medical breakthrough, and I think that's pretty exciting."

UT Southwestern researchers are likewise excited about this partnership with the community.

"It's really the first time we'll be able to utilize some of our discoveries from the basic science laboratories and actually see them applied to real people who are suffering from heart disease," said UT Southwestern cardiologist Dr. Tom Andrews, another of four medical directors of the project. "Also, it is our first opportunity to really partner with the Dallas community to make a difference in heart disease."

UT Southwestern has contracted Research Triangle Institute, an independent research organization known for its expertise in survey methods and statistics, to conduct the survey.

Within each chosen geographic area, individual households will be selected by chance. Then, within each of these households, only one person will be selected – again, by chance. Knowing that some residents will decline to participate in this voluntary survey, researchers have set a goal of 7,000 consenting participants.

Starting in June, field researchers will begin visiting homes and interviewing participants about their medical and family history; their knowledge of heart disease; and their ideas on preventing it. In a second home visit, participants will be asked to provide a blood and urine sample. Thirdly, some participants will be asked to come to a UT Southwestern clinic for extensive heart tests including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), electrocardiogram (EKG) and electron-beam computed tomography (EBCT).

All information will be confidential, but with the participant's consent, any abnormalities will be reported to their personal physicians. The project does not have funding to provide further medical care, but researchers can provide a list of Dallas area doctors who have agreed to see

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### **DALLAS HEART DISEASE PREVENTION PROJECT - 3**

participants on short notice if the tests reveal a need for medical attention.

The field survey portion of the study is projected to take 15 months.

Participants' medical health will be followed by telephone contact and by automated tracking of hospital admissions to 47 area hospitals for the duration of the four-year project.

Collected data will be analyzed to uncover new, treatable causes of heart disease and identify the barriers to awareness and treatment of heart disease in the various ethnic populations of Dallas.

UT Southwestern won a nationally competitive \$24 million grant from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation to develop new strategies to combat heart disease last year. UT Southwestern's Reynolds Center began operation in October 1999. The Dallas Heart Disease Prevention Project is the centerpiece of the Reynolds Center that will bridge basic research and patient care. The center also has a research and development component and a professional-education component.

The U.S. Public Health Service set a goal of reducing deaths from heart disease and stroke by 20 percent in all segments of the U.S. population by the year 2010.

"It's an ambitious goal, and we won't even get close unless we scrap business as usual and adopt bold new strategies such as the Dallas Heart Disease Prevention Project," Victor said.

"Heart disease is a real life problem that can only be solved by researchers and community members working together," he said. "We cannot solve this problem alone in our laboratories at the medical center. If we join forces, we can finally eliminate the heart disease epidemic in Dallas. And we can be a pacesetter for the rest of the country."

Residents can learn more about the Dallas Heart Disease Prevention Project by calling the hotline at 214-648-4555 or logging onto the World Wide Web at <http://cardiology.swmed.edu/heartbeat/>

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