

NEWS from the Office of Information
The University of Texas (Southwestern)
Medical School at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Blvd., Dallas, 75235
Telephone 631-3220, Ext. 404 or 460

Contact Bob Fenley or John Weeks

DALLAS--Changing attitudes affecting medical education have plunged the field of scientific research into crisis, says a Dallas scientist who is the new president of the Southern Society for Clinical Investigation.

Dr. Marvin D. Siperstein of The University of Texas (Southwestern) Medical School at Dallas blames federal budget-cutters for the short-term difficulties facing medical researchers, but he describes the underlying problem of greater long-term portent as philosophical rather than economic.

"The primary reason for the present crisis," he says, "is a major reorientation on the part of government, and to an extent the academic community, regarding the role of the medical school in the overall health care picture."

The emergent challenge to the importance of research involves the basic concept of "what a university is or isn't," the nationally prominent scientist said.

--more--

first add siperstein

The medical school traditionally has been devoted to research and teaching in a scholarly environment, he said. It has never been a major vehicle for the solution of community health problems.

"Recently, there has been tremendous external pressure to induce the medical school to assume a direct responsibility for the delivery of health care," he said.

"The medical school also is being asked to take on problems in transportation, birth control, the socio-economic problems of the ghetto--and, frankly, it is not always competent to handle them.

"And if it were, its competence would be destroyed by the enormity of the demands made upon it in assuming these responsibilities."

Do medical scientists fail to recognize the urgency or importance of these problems? Not in the least, says Dr. Siperstein.

"Medical educators realize there are major problems in the area of health care," he said. "But a university medical school by its philosophy and the direction of its basic thrusts toward scholarship, teaching and scientific inquiry should remain in an environment free of the pressures of instant cures, instant solutions to admittedly urgent social problems."

--more--

second add siperstein

"The difficulty lies," he said, "in a changing national philosophy from the post-Sputnik era, during which science was elevated to high importance, to a pragmatic era of immediate problem-solving."

"If this pragmatic philosophy is pursued," he said, "there will be no time for the long-range solutions to problems." And this is what deeply worries researchers.

"Research has made enormous strides in easing mankind's suffering, and has prolonged human life while continuing its struggle to solve the riddles of cancer and other catastrophic diseases," he said.

Even the riddle of cancer has begun to yield to relentless assault in the laboratory, he pointed out.

"Three types of cancer have been brought under effective clinical control," he said. These he listed as Wilms' tumor, a rare tumor of the kidneys of children; neuroblastoma, a malignancy of the nervous system, and certain types of leukemia, or cancer of the blood-producing system.

Dr. Siperstein said research is not only vital to the progress of medical science, but is the lifeblood of a medical school itself.

--more--

third add siperstein

"Most medical school teachers also are skilled researchers, and the two functions are mutually supportive," he explained. "Continued scientific study through research results in the professional growth that brings excellence to teaching. At the same time, research funds help the schools support their most capable teachers.

"Without research, teaching in the medical school will die," he said.

Cutbacks in federal support are affecting not only medical research but the training of new medical school faculty as well, Dr. Siperstein said.

"It is particularly ironic," he noted, "that funds for the training of new medical school teachers are being reduced at precisely the time that the state is beginning to establish two new medical schools."

While the primary task of the medical school is the instruction of medical students, a major aim of UTSMS includes the teaching of others, such as post-doctoral students, practicing physicians returning for additional study, graduate students in specialized scientific fields and research fellows.

"From this pool of scientific talent will come the desperately needed medical school teachers and researchers of tomorrow," he said.

--more--

fourth add siperstein

Dr. Siperstein is professor of internal medicine at the Dallas medical school. He is a nationally-recognized investigator into cancer and diabetes and is the author of many scientific papers detailing the findings of his clinical studies, which have won him numerous national awards, including the Modern Medicine Distinguished Achievement Award in 1969. He has been on the UTSMS faculty since 1955.

The Dallas scientist was elected to a one-year term recently as president of the Southern Society for Clinical Investigation, a principal organization of noted researchers which serves as a focus for academic excellence in medicine.

At their recent meeting in New Orleans members of the society expressed alarm over what they termed the "crisis in communication" between the scientific medical community and the public on the one hand and the government on the other, Dr. Siperstein said.

The organization voted to embark on a major informational drive to inform the public better about the advances of medical science and to present their case at the political level for continued financial support for medical research.

MARCH 20, 1970

##