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UT Southwestern receives \$700,000 from HHMI to promote medical education of Ph.D. students

DALLAS – Dec. 10, 2009 – A UT Southwestern Medical Center program designed to teach medical basics and clinical research to graduate students has received \$700,000 from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI).

The funding from HHMI's Med into Grad Initiative supports a program begun in 2008 by Dr. Helen Yin, professor of physiology at UT Southwestern.

"Basic scientists could greatly affect human health if they communicated more with clinicians and discussed their research," Dr. Yin said. "The goal of our program is to train Ph.D. students to learn more about translational medicine, or how to move laboratory research to clinical trials. Because we're in a medical school, we're well-positioned to do that."

UT Southwestern is one of 23 institutions nationwide to receive a total of \$16 million over four years from HHMI for the Med into Grad Initiative. It is one of 12 receiving Med into Grad grants for the first time.

"This major grant from HHMI is a creative initiative that highlights the fundamental linkage among our core missions of education, research and patient care," said Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky, president of UT Southwestern. "It will significantly further our highest priorities as an academic medical center committed to biomedical research and its translation into innovative patient care."

As part of the program, eight students in UT Southwestern's Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences will take part in a yearlong curriculum that includes shadowing doctors in hospitals and observing clinical research. They also will write a qualifying exam on a medically relevant translational-research topic. Students will be chosen in the spring of their first year in graduate school based on an application, an interview and a personal statement.

The HHMI funding will help provide student stipends and will support tracking of student progress and further curriculum development, Dr. Yin said. Additional support comes from a grant awarded in 2008 by the UT Graduate Programs Initiative.

The UT Southwestern initiative is a continuation and expansion of the Mechanisms of Disease (MoD) and Translational Science graduate track that Dr. Yin created in 2008. Four graduate students

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completed that intensive, one-year program.

“They were like pioneers,” Dr. Yin said. “These four brave souls are now third-year students, well into their dissertation research.” Seven students joined the program in 2009.

In addition to Dr. Yin, five co-directors oversee the UT Southwestern MoD program:

- Dr. Helen Hobbs, chief of clinical genetics and director of the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development and the Donald W. Reynolds Cardiovascular Clinical Research Center;
- Dr. Michael McPhaul, professor of internal medicine and clinical sciences and associate dean for student research at UT Southwestern Medical School;
- Dr. Milton Packer, chairman of clinical sciences;
- Dr. Philip Shaul, professor of pediatrics; and
- Dr. Andrew Zinn, associate professor in the McDermott Center and internal medicine and associate dean for the Medical Scientist Training Program.

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