

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## **U.S. CONGRESS CREATES NATIONAL MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS TRAINING SITE AT UT SOUTHWESTERN**

DALLAS – March 12, 2001 – UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas will be the site of the new National Training Program for the Comprehensive Care of Individuals With Multiple Sclerosis funded by the U.S. Congress.

The UT Southwestern program, in collaboration with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, will bring neurologists from across the country to the Dallas campus for specific training in treating patients with multiple sclerosis. Ultimately, similar programs would be established at major academic medical centers throughout the nation. The program is funded for one year at \$900,000, and funding for future years is yet to be determined.

Patients will be the main beneficiaries of the program, said Dr. Elliot Frohman, head of UT Southwestern's MS program.

Frohman wrote the appropriations bill presented to Congress. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) and Rep. Henry Bonilla (R-Texas) sponsored the bill.

"This program will directly translate to better care for people with MS," said Frohman, who will direct the new training program at UT Southwestern. "An MS patient has many different health issues, including bone loss, urological issues and depression, as well as treatment for MS progression. Having a doctor well-versed in all those issues can really make an impact on the patient's life."

MS is the most common disabling neurological disorder of young people and affects approximately 350,000 Americans, most between the ages of 20 and 40.

An autoimmune disorder, it attacks the central nervous system and damages the myelin sheath, the protective material that surrounds nerve fibers in the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves. The illness causes numbness, weakness, visual blurring and slurred speech, among other symptoms. While not fatal, MS leads to life-altering disabilities. Patients often cannot walk and may suffer from incontinence or tremors. The exact cause of MS is unknown, and there is no

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## **TRAINING SITE – 2**

cure or way to prevent it; however, effective treatments are available to reduce the attacks and slow progression of the disease.

The UT Southwestern program would enable neurologists to earn continuing medical education credits for completing the MS preceptorship. Neurologists participating in the week-long program would observe patient and doctor interaction, work through various treatment scenarios and take assessment exams before completing the course.

“Multiple sclerosis patients often see their neurologists more than they do their family physicians,” Frohman said. “Neurologists need to be prepared to treat the whole patient. Ultimately, this could lead to cost savings if one physician can provide total care for the MS patient.”

At the UT Southwestern MS program, patients have access to wide-ranging treatments and cutting-edge clinical trials. Frohman, an assistant professor of neurology and ophthalmology, sees that model of care expanded to other metropolitan centers.

“We want to raise the bar of excellence for treatment of MS patients,” he said.

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