

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAM ESCALATES TO MASTER'S DEGREE LEVEL

DALLAS — August 27, 1997 — UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas' physical therapy department will convert to a master's level curriculum next spring.

Current students will continue to pursue a baccalaureate degree, and the last undergraduate degrees will be conferred in 1999. The first class of master's students will graduate in 2000.

The program will train students to rehabilitate patients by improving mobility, relieving pain, and preventing or limiting permanent physical disabilities resulting from injuries or disease.

Therapists evaluate patients' histories, test and measure their strength, range of motion and ability to function, and then develop treatment plans. Treatment may include manipulation of joints and muscles, electrical stimulation, ultrasound and deep-tissue massage.

Dr. Patricia Winchester, chairwoman of physical therapy, said faculty members are pleased that the UT System has endorsed the master's level conversion. Current faculty members will continue in their positions under the new system.

"We feel that the new curriculum will prepare our graduates better to meet the increasing needs of their patients in this rapidly changing health-care environment," Winchester said.

Upcoming graduate classes will enroll 40 students, the same number as current classes. Winchester said she expects competition for those slots to be tough, just as the number of undergraduate applicants has always far outnumbered the students accepted into the program.

Currently, 120 of 145 physical therapy programs in the United States award the

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master's degree or are in transition to the master's level. Effective Jan. 1, 2001, only master's programs in physical therapy will be considered for accreditation or reaccreditation by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education.

The curriculum at UT Southwestern will be strengthened substantially to reflect master's level content. To be admitted, applicants must have already completed a baccalaureate degree, including 56 credit hours in specified prerequisite courses. Once admitted, students must complete 81 credit hours of master's-level physical therapy course work, including a clinical internship.

Similar master's programs are offered at eight other Texas institutions.

Dr. Gordon Green, dean of Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, said its physical therapy program should be well positioned to offer students the best possible education and training. "This conversion will move the program forward," he said. "Students, as well as patients, stand to benefit."

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