

News

Office of Medical Information
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas

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**** Research to Prevent Blindness
awards grant to UT Southwestern

DALLAS -- Research to Prevent Blindness has awarded a \$60,000 grant to The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. The world's leading voluntary supporter of eye research, the organization has made grants to UT Southwestern totaling \$381,000.

Dr. James McCulley, the David Bruton Jr. professor and chairman of ophthalmology, said the grants are becoming increasingly important because federal funding isn't adequate to meet research needs.

Research to Prevent Blindness has channeled more than \$100 million to medical school departments of ophthalmology for studies into all causes of blindness. In conveying the current award, RPB Chairman Lew R. Wasserman said: "Eye research has made possible the medical miracles that each year save the sight of millions of Americans. But advances in therapy are no substitute for the prevention of eye diseases. Ongoing scientific research is the best hope for those afflicted with sight-threatening disorders for which there is no effective treatment at this time."

Research to Prevent Blindness grants support multiple research projects at UT Southwestern, including a study of Acanthamoeba keratitis. This stubborn amoebic infection is caused by the use of contaminated homemade solutions for cleaning contact lenses. If unchecked, it causes significant scarring of the cornea and vision

(More)

loss. Researchers are trying to develop a more effective treatment for this problem as well as for blepharitis, characterized by inflamed and swollen eyelids.

Promoting corneal wound healing is a key to the success of corneal surgery. To study changes that take place on the corneal surface, UT Southwestern researchers are using a new device, a corneal topography unit, to map the corneal landscape. The device creates topographical image of the cornea, enabling researchers to study how the cornea responds to disease, surgery and contact lens usage.

To study diseases and functions below the corneal surface at the cellular level, even deep into the eye, researchers at UT Southwestern are using a confocal microscope, the only one of its kind approved for use in humans by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Earlier this year, ophthalmologists at UT Southwestern achieved remarkable success in treating a viral infection that afflicts 20 percent of AIDS patients, causing blindness. Using an implantable device that slowly releases medication in the eye, the doctors treated patients with Cytomegalovirus retinitis.

In addition to studying diseases that are sight-threatening, ophthalmologists at UT Southwestern are studying a potentially life-threatening problem, melanoma of the eye. These tumors have a high fatality rate because of their tendency to spread to the liver. Researchers are trying to determine how the tumors spread and hope their findings will provide clues about the mechanisms other tumors use to spread.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, affiliated teaching hospitals and outpatient clinics.