

News

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****Heart transplant surgeon directs
multi-institutional program
for cardiac surgery.

DALLAS--Dr. W. Steves Ring came to Dallas to direct the new University of Texas Southwestern Heart Transplant and Cardiothoracic Surgery Program and to establish a national referral center for cardiac surgery.

Today, The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas has been joined by five Dallas hospitals in establishing this ambitious, multi-institutional endeavor -- one of a handful of such coalitions in the country that are under the direction of a single individual.

The UT Southwestern Heart Transplant and Cardiothoracic Surgery Program is underway at Children's Medical Center of Dallas, where Dallas' first pediatric heart transplant was performed April 13. Adult heart transplants will soon be taking place at St. Paul Medical Center in Dallas. In addition, cardiothoracic surgery, without transplantation, is now under Ring's direction at Parkland Memorial Hospital and the Dallas Veterans Administration Medical Center. Ultimately, cardiothoracic surgery, including heart transplantation, will be directed by Ring at UT Southwestern's new teaching and referral hospital, The University Medical Center, scheduled to open in 1990.

Ring began work at UT Southwestern on January 1 as professor and chairman of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery at UT Southwestern. He formerly directed the Cardiac Transplant Program at the University of Minnesota from 1984 until the end of 1987. In Dallas, he expects to perform as many as 60 heart transplants a year.

St. Paul Medical Center officials say they are converting existing cardiac facilities to meet Ring's specifications. They have been developing the expertise and have been hiring individuals during the last year for the heart transplant program at their facility, which is called the UT Southwestern/St. Paul Heart Transplant and Cardiothoracic Surgery Program.

At Children's Medical Center, the heart transplant program, named the UT Southwestern/Children's Medical Center Heart Transplant and Cardiothoracic Surgery Program, is one of only a handful of pediatric heart transplant centers in the country. Currently, Children's Medical Center has several well established transplantation programs. The UT Southwestern/Children's Medical Center Liver Transplant Program, for example, is nationally recognized as one of the most successful in the country. Ninety-five pediatric liver transplants have been performed in just over three years with a remarkable success rate of 77 percent.

In coordinating this joint effort, Ring says his initial goal is to establish the overall heart transplant program. By next year, he expects to perform more complicated heart-lung and isolated lung transplants. But Ring says that, for

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him, the appeal of coming to Dallas centered around the opportunity to develop a total cardiothoracic surgery program and to build UT Southwestern into a major referral center. "If I had wanted only to direct a heart transplant program, I would have stayed in Minnesota," he says.

To accomplish some of his goals, Ring will recruit faculty and ancillary staff. UT Southwestern, however, already has the necessary expertise in transplantation, as well as an excellent team of cardiac surgeons, he says.

"Heart transplant surgery itself is not difficult, and almost any heart surgeon can do it," he says. "It's care before surgery and follow-up care that require specialized training."

"The key before surgery is in knowing whom to select as a candidate and, more importantly, whom to turn down. After surgery, the difficulties are in managing the immunosuppressive medications and handling any complications that may arise.

"More people die awaiting a heart than die after transplantation. Donor hearts are a precious resource because they are in very limited supply, so the transplant surgeon is morally obligated to make every transplant a success. In Minnesota we performed about 150 heart transplants, and more than 95 percent survived the first year. While the patient is never out of the woods, the first three months are the most crucial."

All adult outpatient followup will be handled through the transplant office at St. Paul Medical Center, using their diagnostic resources and the St. Paul Health Institute's Cardiac Rehabilitation Program.

Children's Medical Center will provide the specialized followup care that pediatric heart transplant patients require. Children's multi-disciplinary team of cardiologists, nutritionists, physical therapists, child life workers and nurse educators will work together to help both patients and their families in the recovery process.

Ring says, "Southwestern has an outstanding national reputation as a medical center, and it is seen as particularly strong in the areas of cardiology and medicine. One of my major goals is to bring the cardiac surgery program up to the same level as that accomplished by Dr. James Willerson in cardiology."

Ring was graduated in 1967 from Brown University and went on to receive a master's of medical science degree there. In 1971 he graduated with an M.D. degree from Harvard Medical School. He performed an internship and residency in general surgery at Duke University and served as a fellow and chief surgical resident in cardiothoracic surgery at the University of Minnesota. The author of numerous scientific papers on topics dealing with heart disease and transplantation, Ring is currently on the editorial board of the journal Clinical Transplantation.

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Note: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.