

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN, CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CENTER TO TEST NEW RAPID DIAGNOSTIC EQUIPMENT

DALLAS – Oct. 31, 2002 – Instead of waiting five to seven days to find out if a child brought to the emergency room tests positive for meningitis or whooping cough, new rapid diagnostic testing equipment will provide doctors at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas and Children's Medical Center of Dallas with an answer in a few hours.

A one-year, \$435,000 grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to Children's will allow UT Southwestern researchers to develop protocols, procedures and reagents using a thermocycler called GeneXpert. The automated device, which rapidly processes and analyzes DNA samples, is manufactured by Cepheid of California.

With the new equipment, doctors will be able to quickly diagnose infectious diseases in children brought to the emergency room. Results would be available within hours rather than the five to seven days needed for a culture.

“With the capability of rapid turnaround and ease of DNA testing, the tests could be done seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and even at the patient's bedside,” said Dr. Beverly Rogers, professor of pathology at UT Southwestern and chief of pathology at Children's. “This is not possible with current methods.

“This provides high-tech testing capabilities. This instrument allows a health-care worker to take a swab from a patient, dip it in solution, place it in the instrument and walk away. This is bringing molecular diagnoses into the clinical laboratory.”

The new testing methods should allow children to leave the hospital sooner, or even avoid hospitalization altogether, Rogers said.

Research will focus on developing rapid testing for enterovirus and herpes simplex virus, both of which cause meningitis, and *Bordetella pertussis*, the bacterium that causes whooping cough.

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“Having this grant and collaborating with Cepheid will allow us to march rapidly forward with the development of these tests,” said Rogers.

Funding for the project began in August and the new equipment will be delivered in November.

Last year at Children’s Medical Center, about 350 patients were tested for whooping cough and about 200 for meningitis.

The laboratory for molecular diagnosis in the Department of Pathology at UT Southwestern and Children’s will work jointly on the project.

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