

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Contact: Ione Echeverria  
214-648-3404  
[iechev@email.swmed.edu](mailto:iechev@email.swmed.edu)

## UT SOUTHWESTERN PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES PROGRAM STEPS UP TO MASTER'S DEGREE LEVEL

DALLAS – Oct. 3, 2000 – The Department of Physician Assistant Studies at UT Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School will convert from a bachelor's level program to a master's level curriculum next summer.

UT Southwestern is the third school in Texas – and the first school in the UT System – to receive this level of accreditation from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Currently, 61 of 123 physician assistant programs in the United States award master's degrees.

Current students will continue to pursue a baccalaureate degree; the last undergraduate degrees will be conferred in 2002. The first class of master's students will graduate in 2003.

Physician assistants can practice in any area of medicine. Under a physician's supervision they can conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illness, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive health care, assist in surgery, and in most states write prescriptions.

Dr. Gene Jones, chairman of physician assistant studies at UT Southwestern, said the new master's level curriculum will better prepare students for a competitive marketplace.

“We designed the new curriculum to reflect the rapidly changing health-care environment, thereby enhancing a student's education,” Jones said.

The length of the curriculum has been extended from 27 months to 31 months to reduce the total amount of semester hours taken during the fall and spring semesters. It will include

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advanced courses, such as medical Spanish, managed-care and professional- practice issues, reimbursement, medical jurisprudence, coding and billing, medical ethics and practice-management guidelines.

Another advantage, Jones said, is that the majority of incoming applicants already have undergraduate degrees, making them ineligible for additional financial aid. But seeking a graduate degree would reopen these possibilities.

Dr. Gordon Green, dean of the allied health school, said the rapid expansion of medical knowledge and the increasing complexities of medical practice have resulted in greater demands being placed upon physician assistants.

“UT Southwestern’s physician assistant program is generally acknowledged to be an academic leader in the profession, and we’re pleased with this new developmental milestone in the profession’s maturation,” Green said.

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