

April 6, 1993

## NIEDERKORN AWARDED THE DR. W. MAXWELL THOMAS PROFESSORSHIP

DALLAS--Dr. Jerry Y. Niederkorn, professor of ophthalmology and microbiology at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, has been named the first holder of the Dr. W. Maxwell Thomas Professorship in Ophthalmology.

"This is an honor," said Niederkorn. "Dr. Thomas was one of the pioneers in corneal transplantation in this community, and that is my primary research interest."

Niederkorn has shown that by bathing a corneal graft bed in ultraviolet radiation, he can inhibit its ability to produce an immune response to the graft tissue, thereby eliminating graft rejection. Rejection occurs with approximately 4,000 patients each year. Corneal transplantation already has more than a 90 percent success rate, but Niederkorn hopes they can push the success rate closer to 100 percent if he is able to perfect this technique.

Niederkorn is also studying the immunobiology of Acanthamoeba keratitis, a stubborn parasitic protozoan infection that often develops in people who use homemade or contaminated saline solutions to clean their contact lenses, and ocular melanomas. If successful, researchers hope to develop ways to treat the tumors, save the patient's eyesight and prevent metastasis to the liver.

Niederkorn received his bachelor's degree from Central Methodist College, his master's degree from Central Missouri State University and his doctorate in 1977 from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. He completed a post-doctoral fellowship in immunology at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, now UT Southwestern Medical Center, and subsequently joined its faculty.

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Nieder Korn--2

He is a distinguished immunologist who serves as director of ophthalmic research in the Department of Ophthalmology. He has received awards from Research to Prevent Blindness Inc., Fight for Sight Inc. and the Alcon Research Institute.

W. Maxwell Thomas, for whom the professorship is named, was the first ophthalmologist in Dallas to perform corneal surgery and retinal-detachment surgery and the first to fit contact lenses. A member of the Dallas medical community since the late 1920s, Thomas has been associated with UT Southwestern since its beginning, serving as senior consultant for the division of ophthalmology here from 1946 to 1953. During that period he was also chief of the eye clinics at Children's Medical Center of Dallas, Parkland Memorial Hospital and the McKinney and Dallas Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers. He directed residency programs at each of the facilities, as well. He continued to serve as a volunteer advisor to the ophthalmology department until he retired from medicine in 1985.

This professorship was funded through a gift of real estate to the Southwestern Medical Foundation early last year. Thomas recently contributed an additional \$10,000 to the foundation to support the professorship and has donated hundreds of books, journals and vintage medical instruments to the department.

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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.