

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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PEDIATRIC POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION AWARD

DALLAS – March 3, 2000 – A UT Southwestern pediatric rheumatology fellow has received a prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Foundation fellowship awarded to minority physicians.

Dr. Edsel Arce, a native of Puerto Rico, received a four-year \$365,400 fellowship under the foundation's Minority Medical Faculty Development Program. He came to UT Southwestern in the summer of 1996 because of the medical center's well-respected pediatric rheumatology program.

In addition to taking care of pediatric rheumatology patients at Children's Medical Center of Dallas and Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children, Arce joined the laboratory of Dr. Virginia Pascual, assistant professor of pediatrics and head of pediatric rheumatology at UT Southwestern. Pascual's laboratory collaborates closely with Dr. Jacques Banchereau, UT Southwestern adjunct professor of microbiology and director of the Baylor Institute for Immunology Research. These two institutions in conjunction with Children's and Scottish Rite recently joined efforts to create a center that integrates clinical care, teaching and research in pediatric rheumatology.

"I feel very honored to receive this award, which will let me continue my research for the next four years," said Arce, who received both his Bachelor of Science and medical degree from the University of Puerto Rico. "I feel extremely fortunate and grateful to have had the privilege of working with Drs. Pascual and Banchereau. The pediatric rheumatology program also has provided me with amazing clinical experience."

Arce has been studying the underlying basis of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a chronic inflammatory autoimmune disorder in which one makes antibodies (autoantibodies) to one's own DNA, RNA and proteins. The autoantibodies plus their targets form immune complexes that damage small blood vessels. Although rare in children under the age of five, 25 percent of all SLE cases start before age 18 and affect three to six times more females than males.

(MORE)

JOHNSON FOUNDATION AWARD - 2

The disease, which is episodic and can affect many organs, is characterized by hyperactivity of B cells, a type of white blood cell that arises in the bone marrow. Arce and Pascual have found that the blood of SLE patients contains a certain type of activated B cells that is normally found only in peripheral lymphoid organs, such as the tonsils and lymph nodes. They now are expanding their studies in children with SLE and comparing them with healthy children and adults.

“Edsel, who did not have any research experience when he arrived, is already preparing to submit his first scientific paper,” Pascual said. “He is a wonderful person. In the lab he is always willing to help everybody, and in the hospital his patients and their families adore him.”

Arce is looking forward to joining UT Southwestern's pediatrics faculty within the next several months. He will continue to collaborate with Pascual and Banchereau.

The Minority Medical Faculty Development Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is designed to increase the number of minority faculty who will continue in academic medicine and who will foster the development of succeeding classes of minority physicians. Fellowships are awarded to minority physicians who demonstrate exceptional academic and clinical skills.

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