News
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*****New General Clinical Research Support program offers training in academic medical research.

DALLAS--The new General Clinical Research Support program at The University of Texas Health Science Center aims at nurturing an "endangered species" -- the physician/investigator.

The innovative program, part of the newly opened General Clinical Research Center facility at the UTHSCD Aston Center, is designed to train young investigators in clinical research. The training program includes a seven week rotation by medical residents, an elective by medical students and a four week rotation by M.D.-Ph.D. students. Trainees join the GCRC clinical researchers in patient studies as well as laboratory studies to become acquainted with academic research. Trainees are exposed to all aspects of inpatient and outpatient clinical research including study design, preparation of protocols, data review, lay consents and grant applications, preparation of manuscripts, laboratory techniques such as metabolic balance and the essentials of metabolic diets.

"Nationally and locally there has been a great attrition of academic researchers with many researchers and trainees deciding to enter private practice," says Dr. Charles Y.C. Pak, GCRC director and head of the research support program. "We hope to encourage some to pursue clinical research through this training experience."

"By seeing patients and by spending a considerable amount of time with the investigators, we are able to get insight into how clinical research is done," says Internal Medicine chief resident Dr. Robert Graham. "We participate in meetings of lab personnel, nurses and dietitians and work closely with the faculty, who are very supportive in helping us with our own research projects."

Projects being pursued by young investigators include studies by the two chief residents of Internal Medical at Parkland Memorial Hospital and by a fourth-year resident coordinating a research project with Internal Medicine professor Dr. Norman Kaplan. They include:

***Vitamin D may have an effect in lessening the growth of fibrous tissue in bone marrow caused by a group of diseases that include one form of leukemia, according to chief resident Graham working with UTHSCD Cancer Center director Dr. Eugene Frenkel. "We want to see if vitamin D will inhibit fibrosis in several myeloproliferative diseases, such as chronic granulocytic leukemia and myelofibrosis," Graham says. In each of these diseases fibrous tissue displaces normal bone marrow. "Animal studies suggest it might work," he says, "but studies have not been done in humans."

***"Pseudohyperparathyroidism" is a long name for a rare condition that will stunt bone growth and cause muscle spasms, weakness and calcium deposits in the brain, according to Dr. Jordan Weingarten, Internal Medicine chief resident, who is working with Dr. Neil Breslau. The disease is termed "pseudo" because the patients make enough parathyroid hormone but their bodies don't respond to the hormone. Weingarten and Breslau, assistant director of the GCRC, have reason to think that a drug used for asthma will prove helpful in this disease. Patients in the study are also being treated with calcium and vitamin D.

***The effects of a calcium blocking drug used for high blood pressure on total body metabolism is being investigated by fourth year Internal Medicine resident Dr. Roderick Meese, coordinating the study for Kaplan. This project involves metabolic testing on patients with mild to moderate hypertension. While the drug works well to decrease the tone of blood vessels and lower blood pressure, the researchers want to know the effects on metabolic processes and hormones known to depend on calcium, says Meese.

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