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## **UT Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School upgrades physical therapy, radiology program offerings**

DALLAS – Dec. 13, 2007 – There were no coin tosses when it came time for Nate Foreman to choose a physical therapy school.

For Mr. Forman, an Oklahoma native who had been accepted to several schools, it was UT Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School whether heads or tails.

“The main deciding factor for me was the school’s transition to the doctorate program,” he said. “A doctorate makes you more appealing to employers and could open some doors in the future. More importantly, though, the transition to the doctorate degree means a more in-depth education which will be extremely beneficial to both physical therapists and our patients.”

UT Southwestern Medical Center, the first UT System institution and the second public university in Texas to offer a doctorate of physical therapy degree, enrolled its first doctoral students in May. Mr. Foreman is one of 35 in the inaugural DPT class.

Dr. Raul Caetano, dean of the Allied Health Sciences School, said the group is significant because it’s the first doctoral degree ever offered at the school.

“It demonstrates the development of allied health professions and the slow shift we’ve been making from a predominantly undergraduate school to a graduate school,” Dr. Caetano said.

Dr. Patricia Winchester, chair of physical therapy at UT Southwestern, said the transition to the entry level clinical doctoral degree ensures that the graduate physical therapist is able to meet the constantly evolving needs of the health-care consumer.

“The DPT better prepares graduates with the skills necessary for autonomous practice and improved collaboration with other health-care providers,” Dr. Winchester said.

Billy Crawford, education coordinator for physical therapy, said the idea is to prepare physical therapists better for direct access to patients.

“Physician referrals direct patients to physical therapists currently,” Mr. Crawford said. “With direct access, a therapist could treat a patient who came in straight off the street. That’s the direction the profession is moving.”

The doctor of physical therapy isn’t the only new degree program offered by the allied health sciences school.

(MORE)

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School leaders are also preparing to launch a program in radiation therapy, the first in North Texas and one of three statewide. When classes begin in the 2008-09 academic year, the school will offer both a bachelor's degree and post-baccalaureate certificate in radiation therapy.

Carol Scherbak, assistant professor and program chief of radiation therapy, said UT Southwestern students will have access to a clinical learning environment with state-of-the-art equipment on campus.

“Radiation oncology performs advanced cancer treatments with cutting-edge technology,” she said. “There’s a Gamma Knife in the Stereotactic Radiosurgery Center at UT Southwestern University Hospital - Zale Lipshy, which also houses a CyberKnife system. Our students will be trained to use some of the most technologically advanced equipment available for cancer treatment.”

As part of a medical radiation oncology team, radiation therapists use machines – called linear accelerators – to administer radiation treatment to patients. The therapists also work closely with radiation oncologists; medical radiation physicists, who calibrate the linear accelerators among other duties; and dosimetrists, who calculate the amount of radiation for each treatment.

Ms. Scherbak said the school will accept four to six students the first year. The program’s size is limited partly by the number of linear accelerators at the W.A. Monty and Tex Moncrief Radiation Oncology Building, where most clinical training for the radiation therapy students will take place. There are four accelerators at the facility.

“Also, our accrediting board requires that everything we do with our students be one-on-one,” Ms. Scherbak said. “By admitting a small number of students, we will be able to give individualized attention to those students in the clinical learning environment.”

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