

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN'S GENERAL INTERNAL MEDICINE DIVISION PROVIDES PRIMARY PATIENT CARE

DALLAS – Feb. 3, 2003 – The division of general internal medicine at UT Southwestern Medical Center has a faculty of 37 physicians who last year treated more than 62,000 patients for illnesses ranging from allergies to heart disease.

Internists work as primary-care physicians who diagnose and treat virtually all illnesses while referring complex cases to specialists. Common ailments treated by internists include diabetes, hypertension and pneumonia.

“We’re the traditional family doctor, excluding surgery and obstetrics,” said Dr. W. Gary Reed, chief of general internal medicine. “We do a little bit of everything. We’re usually the first people that somebody calls when they’re sick.”

The division’s faculty also are responsible for about half the teaching done by the Department of Internal Medicine – the medical center’s largest department – which has 17 other divisions, including cardiology, infectious diseases and hematology/oncology, said Reed, holder of the S.T. Harris Family Distinguished Chair in Internal Medicine and the Eva A. Rosenthal Professorship in Internal Medicine.

General internal medicine is the largest single clinical-care division at UT Southwestern. Its outpatient facilities are located at the James W. Aston Ambulatory Care Center and at Parkland Memorial Hospital. Faculty members also provide inpatient care and conduct consultations at Zale Lipshy University Hospital, St. Paul University Hospital and Parkland.

In addition, faculty clinicians at UT Southwestern also provide care to patients at Children’s Medical Center of Dallas, the Dallas Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the UT Southwestern Moncrief Cancer Center in Fort Worth and a number of other affiliated hospitals and clinics in Dallas, Fort Worth and surrounding areas.

Internists make initial assessments of a patient’s needs and arrange appropriate medical care, said Dr. Ellwood Jones, professor of internal medicine.

“Our job is to try to get the big picture and to coordinate care,” he said. “Our patients

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may have multiple medical problems, so communication is key with us, whether it be with other specialists, insurance providers or the patients themselves.”

General internal medicine faculty physicians teach the physical diagnosis courses for first- and second-year medical students at Southwestern Medical School, said Dr. Al Roberts, associate dean for practice development, and holder of the Tim and Toni Hartman Professorship in Medicine. They also instruct third- and fourth-year students in general medicine in the wards and clinics of Parkland.

“Preventive care is another main focus for doctors of internal medicine,” Roberts said. They encourage patients to schedule regular check-ups, which give health-care providers an opportunity to screen for diseases such as cancer, and counsel the patients about diet and exercise.

“We are responsible for ensuring general preventive care, whether it be making sure that patients are getting annual mammograms and Pap smears, educating them about the symptoms of colon cancer, or monitoring cholesterol levels,” said Dr. Steven Leach, associate professor of internal medicine and holder of the Irene Wadel and Robert Atha Professorship of Internal Medicine, in Honor of John W. Burnside, M.D.

Physicians also conduct preoperative medical risk assessments to help predict and prevent any complications of surgery or general anesthesia, Reed said.

The general internal medicine division’s annual operating budget is about \$10 million. In addition to the faculty, the division employs 34 staff members in its Aston clinic and 18 in its academic office.

UT Southwestern is re-naming the division as the William T. Solomon and Gay F. Solomon Division of General Internal Medicine, in recognition of the Solomon’s historic \$10,000,000 endowment gift.

With support provided by the gift, general internal medicine physicians and staff will be the first to begin comprehensive implementation of UT Southwestern’s new initiative to provide patient-centered care and service.

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