

UT News

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****Dr. Paul Bergstresser appointed chairman
of Department of Dermatology

DALLAS--Immunodermatologist Dr. Paul Bergstresser has been appointed professor and chairman of the Department of Dermatology at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas.

Bergstresser, a member of the health science center dermatology faculty since 1976, had served as acting chairman of the department since the death of former chairman Dr. James Gilliam in 1984.

With the chairmanship, Bergstresser assumes duties as director of the National Institutes of Health-sponsored Center of Immunodermatology, a funding mechanism through which the dermatology department pursues unique projects probing skin-related diseases.

From funds provided by the center grant, the UTHSCD Department of Dermatology has received national acclaim in the newly emerging area of immunodermatology. Immunodermatology focuses on the skin as a theater for a variety of immune responses, among them the inflammatory processes involved in irritation and blistering.

Outstanding research performed by Bergstresser demonstrated that there is a disruption of immune response in mice when they are exposed to certain wave lengths of radiation from the sun, called "ultraviolet B" or "UVB." One key to this immune system failure, according to Bergstresser, seems to be damage to Langerhans cells in the skin. Langerhans cells appear to function like the body's macrophages--the immune system's first line of defense against foreign materials. UVB radiation causes Langerhans cells to become sickly or to die. If UVB radiation is applied over human skin there is a 10-fold reduction of these cells, says Bergstresser.

Psoriasis, another disorder being studied by Bergstresser, seems to be helped by UVB. Psoriasis, with its small, red papules that are covered in time by scale, can envelope 100 percent of the body. One aspect of the disease under analysis is the link between psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.

The major expression of psoriasis is the plaque on the skin's surface and a massive enlargement of the epidermis. Of patients who must be hospitalized for extensive cutaneous lesions, about half have arthritis. Treating the skin also improves the arthritis, says Bergstresser.

Bergstresser, who is a native of Los Alamos, N.M., graduated from The College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio, and received an M.D. degree from Stanford University. He performed an internship in internal medicine at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine and was a resident in dermatology programs at both Stanford and the University of Miami. He served as chief of dermatology at Irwin Army Hospital, Fort Riley, Kan.

Currently he is assistant medical director of the Transplant Resources and Services Center at UTHSCD and is a faculty member in the Immunology Program of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

He is a fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology and the American College of Physicians and a member of numerous local, regional and national organizations, among them the American Dermatologic Society for Allergy and Immunology, the Dermatology Foundation, the Society for Investigative Dermatology and the South Central Dermatologic Congress.

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