

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## **NEW 'SLEEP DOCS' AT UT SOUTHWESTERN LEARN TO TREAT PATIENTS WITH SLUMBER PROBLEMS**

DALLAS – June 25, 2003 – People know to contact a doctor when they're sick or injured. But if they can't sleep, they may benefit by waking up to a new specialty at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas and contacting a sleep doctor.

A new sleep fellowship established at UT Southwestern is training specialists from neurology, pulmonology, psychiatry and psychology to address the myriad of conditions and potential problems associated with sleep. Only the second such program in Texas, it is accredited by the American Association of Sleep Medicine. The fellows in the UT Southwestern program rotate through Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas, the Dallas Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Children's Medical Center of Dallas.

Dr. John Herman, associate professor of psychiatry at UT Southwestern said consulting a specialist trained in treating serious sleep problems makes sense.

"Sleep problems – like insomnia, when you can't fall asleep or wake all during the night, or apnea, when you may actually stop breathing – can play havoc with a person's health, family life or even career," Dr. Herman said.

Treatment regimens are as varied as the problems.

Insomnia, the most common sleep disorder, is attacked with biofeedback, progressive muscle relaxation and behavioral changes before medications are prescribed, Dr. Herman said.

Apnea is the sleep complaint that most often sends patients in search of a specialist. Apnea patients, who often snore like freight trains and fall asleep during the day, are often fitted with C-Paps, facemask-like devices that deliver oxygen while the wearer sleeps.

Narcolepsy, another disorder, also causes daytime sleeping. Narcolepsy patients often fall asleep instantly. Standard treatment is usually stimulants, Dr. Herman said.

People with restless-leg syndrome may not realize why they are so tired during the day – their nocturnal movements may become so violent that they jerk themselves awake.

(MORE)

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Other sleep disorders that fellows treat include chronic sleeplessness, shift-workers' and travelers' circadian rhythm disturbance, sleepwalking and nocturnal seizures, said Dr. Philip Becker, associate professor of psychiatry at UT Southwestern and head of instructional rotation at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas. Dr. Gregory Carter, associate professor of neurology, oversees the sleep fellowship at the VA.

Youngsters are also prone to sleep disorders, said Dr. Herman, head of the fellowship at Children's Medical Center. Disorders he treats include impaired respiration in newborns, chronic sleeplessness, night terrors, narcolepsy, sleepwalking, nocturnal seizures, reflux-related apnea, sleep-related cardiac problems and bedwetting in older children.

For more information on the sleep fellowship or to contact a sleep doctor, please call 214-456-8732.

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