

# UT Southwestern

## Medical Center

### Reflecting on FY24 achievements and setting priorities for FY25

Sept. 3, 2024

To the UT Southwestern Community:

As we return from the Labor Day weekend and begin the academic year, I write as I have in past years to welcome those faculty, staff, learners, and trainees who are new to our UT Southwestern community. I also write to highlight notable accomplishments and milestones of the fiscal year that just concluded and update you on institutional priorities for the year ahead.

Even though this communication is quite lengthy, it still encompasses only a fraction of what we collectively achieved this past year.

#### **New leadership appointments**

At its core, our institution's strength depends on the values, quality, and commitment of its people. We are fortunate that UT Southwestern continues to attract top talent from across the nation. During this past year, that has included an Executive Vice President, two Vice Provosts, and five Academic Department Chairs, as well as more than 6,000 new faculty and staff.

In December, we welcomed **Jonathan Efron, M.D.**, to oversee our clinical enterprise as Executive Vice President for Health System Affairs. The arrival of Dr. Efron, an accomplished colorectal surgeon and physician leader from Johns Hopkins Medicine, marks the next chapter in our clinical transformation.

In February, **Sherry Huang, M.D.**, began her work as Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Education, succeeding Charles Ginsburg, M.D., who retired after 50 years of service at UTSW. A pediatric gastroenterologist and investigator, Dr. Huang is an expert on inherited colon cancer syndromes and came to UTSW from Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences, now known as Rutgers Health. She brings deep experience in leading both undergraduate and graduate medical education.

Last month, **Alyssa H. Hasty, Ph.D.**, became our newest Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Career Development. Dr. Hasty, a leader in the field of immunometabolism who has studied the role of the immune system in obesity-accelerated diseases such as cardiometabolic disease and cancer, joined UTSW from Vanderbilt University and succeeds Dwain Thiele, M.D., who is retiring after more than 40 years of dedicated service.

I am pleased to report that under the overall leadership of W. P. Andrew Lee, M.D., our Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost, and Dean of the UT Southwestern Medical School, we celebrated the successful outcomes of five highly competitive national searches for Department Chairs. Last fall, **Joseph Merola, M.D., M.M.Sc.**, arrived from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School to serve as our new Chair of Dermatology. As both a dermatologist and an expert in rheumatology, he has developed robust national clinical research networks. Additionally, **Martin G. Pomper, M.D., Ph.D.**, became Chair

of Radiology. A member of the National Academy of Medicine and the National Academy of Inventors who has been a pioneer in the field of theranostics, Dr. Pomper joined us from Johns Hopkins Medicine. This spring, **Julie Pfeiffer, Ph.D.**, was appointed Chair of Microbiology. Since joining UTSW in 2006 after completing postdoctoral studies at Stanford University, Dr. Pfeiffer has established herself as a highly respected scientist and leader whose research centers on interactions between bacteria and viruses.

This week, we welcome **Antonia F. Chen, M.D., M.B.A.**, as the new Chair of Orthopaedic Surgery, and next month **Tarek K. Rajji, M.D., FRCPC**, will join us as the new Chair of Psychiatry, with a secondary appointment in the Peter O'Donnell Jr. Brain Institute. Dr. Chen comes to UTSW from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, where she was Chief of Arthroplasty and Joint Reconstruction and Director of Research of Arthroplasty Services in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery. Dr. Rajji, a former UTSW trainee, returns to us from the University of Toronto where he is Director of the Geriatric Psychiatry Division and Executive Director of the Toronto Dementia Research Alliance.

### **Notable honors and recognitions**

Several of our colleagues earned significant awards this past year for their impact on education, research, and clinical care. In doing so, they elevate the reputation of our institution.

In recognition of his groundbreaking work on innate immunity, **Zhijian "James" Chen, Ph.D.**, Professor of Molecular Biology, was awarded the 2023 **Louisa Gross Horwitz Prize** by Columbia University. His discovery and elucidation of the cGAS-STING pathway, which detects wayward nucleic acids within cells, promises to yield new approaches to the treatment of cancer and autoimmune diseases as well as vaccine development.

**Catherine Spong, M.D.**, Chair and Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, was elected to the elite **National Academy of Medicine (NAM)** based on her contributions to the field of maternal-fetal medicine, her leadership in women's health research, and her dedication to advancing health care for mothers and babies.

**James J. Collins III, Ph.D.**, Professor of Pharmacology, who leads groundbreaking research into the parasitic disease [schistosomiasis](#), was named a **Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Investigator**. UT Southwestern now has 14 HHMI Investigators, 25 members of the National Academy of Sciences, and 22 members of the NAM – substantially more than any other medical institution in Texas in each of these prestigious distinctions.

This past spring, four UTSW physician-scientists were elected to the **American Society for Clinical Investigation (ASCI)**, one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious medical honor societies: **Tamia Harris-Tryon, M.D., Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Dermatology and Immunology, **Rodney Infante, M.D., Ph.D.**, in the Center for Human Nutrition and Associate Professor of Internal Medicine, **Nikhil Munshi, M.D., Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine, Molecular Biology, and in the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development, and **Amil Shah, M.D., M.P.H.**, Professor of Internal Medicine, were recognized for their outstanding scholarly activity.

Also this past spring, **Elizabeth Heitman, Ph.D.**, Professor of Psychiatry, and **Andrew Wang, M.D.**, Professor of Radiation Oncology, were elected as Fellows of the **American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)**, the world's largest multidisciplinary scientific society.

This summer, UTSW nursing leader **Christi Nguyen, D.N.P., RN, NEA-BC, CENP, FACHE**, Assistant Vice President and Associate Chief Nursing Officer – Nursing Excellence, was named to the **American Academy of Nursing 2024 Class of Fellows**, which honors nursing’s most accomplished leaders in policy, research, administration, practice, and academia.

Each year, we highlight the exceptional contributions of clinical faculty to the care of our patients, to the education of the next generation of health care professionals, and to UT Southwestern overall. In addition to many other **Leaders in Clinical Excellence (LCE)** honorees, last November we bestowed the 2023 Patricia and William L. Watson Jr., M.D. Award for Excellence in Clinical Medicine, UTSW’s highest honor in clinical care, to **Karen Kowalske, M.D.**, Professor of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation. With a record-breaking 200-plus nominations received this season, we look forward to celebrating our next recipients at the 2024 LCE Awards ceremony on Nov. 14 in the Tom and Lula Gooch Auditorium.

## Research momentum

UT Southwestern’s commitment to scientific discovery and translation remains a cornerstone of our institution, and our research enterprise continues to thrive with support from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the state of Texas, foundations, and a generous philanthropic community.

UTSW is ranked as the top-rated public institution and No. 3 among global health care institutions by *Nature Index* for its published research in the highest impact scientific journals. The myriad projects underway in our research laboratories led to several thousand original scientific articles. Here are just a few examples from FY24 that exemplify the breadth and vitality of our basic and clinical research programs:

1. **Discovery of noncoding RNA that affects cellular aging:** Using a technique for regulating gene activity called CRISPR interference, a team led by **Joshua Mendell, M.D., Ph.D.**, Professor of Molecular Biology, found that SNORA13 slows the construction of ribosomes and acts as a previously unrecognized regulator of cellular aging and senescence. Further elucidating this process could lead to more effective treatments for conditions such as neurodegenerative and cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer. Read more about the findings published in *Cell* in the [UTSW Newsroom](#).
2. **Gene-editing nanoparticles target cystic fibrosis:** In a study published in *Science*, **Daniel Siegwart, Ph.D.**, Professor of Biomedical Engineering and Biochemistry and in the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center, described the use of Selective Organ Targeting (SORT) developed in his laboratory to use lipid nanoparticles (LNPs) to carry gene-editing molecules to stem cells in lungs in animal models. After one administration, Siegwart Lab members observed long-lasting gene editing in stem and other cell types in the mouse lung, suggesting SORT LNP-mediated gene therapy treatment could result in long-term correction for genetic diseases such as cystic fibrosis. [Learn more](#).
3. **Cancer cells salvage nucleotides to fuel tumor growth:** Scientists have long believed that tumors primarily acquire purine nucleotides – building blocks for DNA necessary for cellular growth and function – by constructing them from scratch via de novo synthesis. In a study published in *Cell*, **Gerta Hoxhaj, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor in the Children’s Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern and of Pediatrics and Biochemistry, and her team found that tumors also use the more efficient salvage, or recycling, pathway to acquire purines,

including from foods. The findings could lead to the inclusion of dietary interventions in cancer treatment. [Learn more.](#)

4. **Specific brain cells linked to weight-loss drugs:** GLP-1 RAs, a popular class of diabetes and weight-loss drugs including semaglutide and tirzepatide, reduces food intake by acting on neurons in the brain. Researchers led by **Kevin Williams, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine in the Center for Hypothalamic Research, identified two populations of neurons in the dorsomedial hypothalamus that the drugs activate: one that turns on at food exposure and another that turns on when eating begins. Further research could help improve the efficacy of the drugs in treating metabolic conditions. Read more about the findings published in [Science](#) in the [UTSW Newsroom](#).

5. **Clinical trial developed for patients with multiple chronic conditions:** The co-occurrence of chronic health conditions is increasingly common in the U.S., but barriers exist to the delivery of guideline-directed therapies. Seeking solutions, **Miguel Vazquez, M.D.**, Professor of Internal Medicine and Clinical Director of the Division of Nephrology, and **Robert Toto, M.D.**, Professor of Internal Medicine, led a clinical trial to test interventions on 11,000 patients with the kidney-dysfunction triad of chronic kidney disease, Type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. The study, published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), addressed a lack of research on the effectiveness of guideline-based interventions in health care settings and included patients from racial groups who are typically underrepresented in clinical trials. [Learn more.](#)

Also, this past fall, UT Southwestern, in partnership with The University of Texas at Dallas, opened the **Texas Instruments Biomedical Engineering and Sciences Building** on our East Campus. The facility offers a distinctive research environment for biomedical innovation to improve patient care, facilitate advances in fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), molecular imaging, robotics, and genetic engineering, and further solidify North Texas as a hub for transformative technologies.

### Forward-looking education and training

The **Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health** entered its second full year under the leadership of founding Dean **Saad Omer, M.B.B.S., M.P.H., Ph.D.**, ushering in a new cohort in the Master of Public Health (M.P.H.) program. Several students are also enrolled in the Doctor of Medicine/Master of Public Health (M.D./M.P.H.) dual degree program, and a first-ever cohort of students are pursuing a Ph.D. in public health at UT Southwestern. The O'Donnell School of Public Health eagerly anticipates graduating its inaugural class of M.P.H. students next May while continuing to prioritize rigorous research and community outreach to address public health needs.

Last month, the **Medical School Class of 2028** arrived, with each student bringing a record of outstanding academic and personal accomplishments. These learners represent 74 undergraduate schools. Eleven will pursue combined M.D./Ph.D. degrees as members of the **Perot Family Scholars Medical Scientist Training Program** at UT Southwestern.

The **School of Health Professions** is celebrating the arrival of students for two new master's programs, one in genetic counseling and the other in clinical nutrition – nutrition sciences; the latter will be the first fully online offering at our institution. These are in addition to the existing six degree programs already available at the school.

The Division of Basic Sciences within the **Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences** welcomed matriculants this summer across its Basic Biomedical Sciences (60%), Biomedical Engineering (33%), and Organic Chemistry (7%) Ph.D. programs. The Clinical Psychology doctoral program within the Division of Clinical Sciences has also enrolled its newest class of students.

Finally, in July, we welcomed our newest cadre of residents and fellows who will collectively pursue training across the full spectrum of clinical specialties and subspecialties, in addition to postdoctoral research fellows who are making significant contributions as they pursue the final stage of their research training.

### **Commitment to care**

Our care teams – physicians, nurses, advanced practice providers, and all those directly or indirectly helping our patients – have again demonstrated a staunch commitment to quality, patient experience (top 2% of all academic medical centers), and multidisciplinary, team-based care. UTSW has been rated 5 stars – the highest possible – by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for the last five years, based on performance in categories including safety of care, patient experience, and timely and effective care. In Vizient Inc.'s HCAHPS ratings, short for Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems, UTSW has been among the top five in “overall rating” and “likely to recommend” of all large academic medical centers for the past five years and was No. 1 in 2023, the most recent year of record. As of this June, patient satisfaction in our ambulatory settings, measured by “likelihood to recommend,” also exceeded top decile performance.

Our achievements in quality and service contributed to UT Southwestern being ranked the No. 1 hospital in Dallas-Fort Worth by **U.S. News & World Report** for the eighth consecutive year. Additionally, 11 of our specialties were nationally ranked – the most of any hospital in Texas. The 2024-25 **Best Hospitals** list also rated our care as “High Performing” – the highest designation – in 19 of 20 procedures and conditions. More than 4,500 hospitals were evaluated.

At the same time that our Health System has achieved these impressive outcomes, we have been extraordinarily busy. We concluded FY24 with roughly 5.2 million patient visits, a 4% increase over the prior year, encompassing the care we provide within our own facilities and in working with our longest-standing partners, Parkland Health and Children’s Health, but also including Scottish Rite for Children, the VA North Texas Health Care System, and Texas Health Resources. We have expanded capacity not only on our main campus, but also at our regional medical centers at RedBird, Coppell, Frisco, Fort Worth, and Richardson/Plano.

### **Capital investments for the future**

UT Southwestern is continuing to grow strategically to meet the needs of our community now and into the future. In FY24, in partnership with Children’s Health, we announced our most ambitious clinical expansion project ever – a \$5 billion transformative **new pediatric campus** to be located on our North Campus and connected to William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital across Harry Hines Boulevard. Our two organizations have received a historic \$100 million gift from the Jean and Mack Pogue family to support our efforts to advance pediatric medical care, education, and research. There is already increasing activity on the site, and the formal groundbreaking for construction is scheduled for Oct. 1, with expected completion in FY31.

Construction remains on schedule and budget for the **Texas Behavioral Health Center at UT Southwestern**, the first state mental health hospital in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, built in partnership with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. This facility will allow UTSW to respond to our community's ever-increasing need for mental health services, especially for those individuals suffering from the most serious psychiatric illnesses. Construction of the adult wing will be completed by July 2025, with the pediatric wing expected to open in winter 2026.

Also on campus, the 18-month extensive **renovation of Zale Lipshy Pavilion** will be largely finished in the next few months. The hospital's infrastructure has been modernized, and patients and staff will benefit from updated surgical suites, rehabilitation spaces that promote healing, expanded dining areas, and improved accessibility for the mobility challenged.

### **UTSW as a workplace**

Everything we accomplish as an institution is dependent upon and attributable to the dedication of those who work here, and we continue to prioritize initiatives to enhance our institutional culture and ensure that everyone feels supported, valued, and equipped with the resources needed to succeed in their career at UTSW. Several initiatives were recently launched to help us attract and retain the very best individuals across all roles at UT Southwestern. Two days ago, **Your Time Away**, our new comprehensive leave program, went into effect based on employee suggestions over the years and following months of in-person and virtual employee learning sessions led by our Human Resources team. We hope you find the new plan offers added benefits and greater flexibility in how you spend your paid time away from work, whether for vacation, an illness, a field trip with a child, or any other personal reason.

At the same time, we know there are always opportunities to improve our work environment, culture, and community to help you excel. It is in that context that later this month we will launch two important employee engagement surveys so we can learn from you: **Values in Practice (VIP)** through Glint, which UTSW has historically used, and a survey that is new to our campus called **SCORE**, developed by Vizient, a leading health care performance improvement company. This year, all members of our Health System – faculty, staff, and those who interact closely with them across Academic and Business Affairs – will be asked to complete SCORE, whereas all other staff will be asked to once again provide feedback through VIP. Both surveys ask for candor and your honest assessment of how UT Southwestern performs in areas such as safety, communication, resiliency/burnout, and engagement. Your responses and comments will all be kept confidential and are necessary for our rigorous assessment and annual action plans. We aim to be a **High Reliability Organization (HRO)** that prioritizes teamwork and consistently achieves safety, quality, and efficiency goals.

At UT Southwestern, we believe your wellness and safety – physical and psychological – are critically important. In FY24, we partnered with **Headspace**, a global leader in mindfulness, therapy, and employee assistance programs, to expand services previously offered by our Employee Assistance Program. [Headspace](#) provides confidential mental health care to you and your dependents, as well as access to one-on-one coaching support, hundreds of mindfulness exercises, and video-based therapy and psychiatry services in multiple languages. Additionally, we have rolled out an initiative called [SAFE](#) that provides reporting avenues when you observe or experience concerning behaviors by staff, faculty, or learners, enabling a specially trained, multidisciplinary intervention unit to intercede proactively when appropriate. Email [safe@utsouthwestern.edu](mailto:safe@utsouthwestern.edu) or call 877-507-7319.

Finally, in the context of our determination to attract the very best, this summer marked a first for UT Southwestern as we embarked on a national advertising campaign to raise awareness of UTSW and enhance talent acquisition in all domains. Our [Follow Your Spark](#) video has been seen widely on social media and television in 10 major media markets, including Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, New York, and large cities throughout Texas. As a result of these efforts, over just a few months, we've experienced an 85% spike in new users to our utsouthwestern.edu website year over year and a 20% increase in visits to our Careers page, and several new hires for both faculty and staff have already been sparked by the initiative. Our national campaign will continue in the fall.

## Financial performance

As we began FY24, we knew we faced a challenging budget environment, much like our peer institutions across the country. Inflation drove up expenses in all areas of our mission and outpaced any increases in grant funding levels or reimbursement rates for clinical services, particularly those funded by the federal government, most notably Medicare. Accordingly, our budget called for us to achieve a very modest 0.5% margin. Although final results will not be formally available until next month, I am pleased to share that the preliminary assessment indicates that, through exceptional discipline and hard work by the entire campus, we achieved an approximately 2.5% margin. This is a great accomplishment, although over the long term we know we need to get to an average annual margin of 3% to ensure the sustained strength of our institution. Given that many of the same headwinds exist this year, we have more work to do to maintain this positive momentum, but performance in FY24 provides some basis for confidence as we begin FY25.

## Coming attractions and additional priorities for FY25 and beyond

From each year to the next, our foundational priority remains to deliver excellence in all we do. That manifests in the care we provide to our patients, our dedication to discovery, and the education and training of the next generation of biomedical scientists, physicians, and other caregivers. Beyond our continuing work on the priorities and projects that were the focus of FY24, we are identifying ways to enable those living in the region to access our care closer to their homes. We hope to receive approval from The University of Texas System Board of Regents later this fall to finalize plans to develop a comprehensive radiation oncology center connected to the UT Southwestern Moncrief Cancer Institute, thereby expanding **cancer care in Fort Worth**.

I note that we will soon celebrate a special milestone: Dec. 6 will mark the **10th anniversary of the opening of Clements University Hospital**. More than 23,000 patients were admitted for treatment that first year. More than 41,000 ill or injured people came to the Emergency Department, and UT Southwestern faculty performed approximately 17,500 surgical procedures (including about 200 solid organ transplants). For comparison, FY24 recorded over **33,000 admissions, 58,000 ED visits, and 55,000 surgeries and procedures** (including 500 solid organ transplants).

In FY25, in response to your feedback, we plan to establish **campuswide recognition awards focused on staff across all aspects of our institutional mission**, complementing existing programs such as the Diana and Richard C. Strauss Service Excellence Awards and Leaders in Clinical Excellence Awards. We will also begin inducting faculty, alongside staff, into our **Quarter Century Club** for 25 years of service at UT Southwestern and recognizing other milestone work anniversaries.

While we have much to celebrate and look forward to, this new academic year will not be without challenges. As noted, we will need to continue to exercise **financial discipline** to most effectively deliver on our mission in the long term. Like most academic medical centers and health systems nationwide, our expenses are rising at a higher rate than our revenue sources, and we must generate the funds necessary to support our workforce, keep our facilities updated, and sustain our operations. In FY25, we will implement recommendations from our **AI Task Force**, including new applications to help us control costs.

We will also begin implementing recommendations made by our **Resiliency Task Force** in the past year. The group identified areas where we can enhance the resilience of our campus to better withstand extreme weather events, which have increasingly impacted the campus in recent years. This means investing in updating and expanding core infrastructure, some of which is more than 60 years old. While largely unseen, this infrastructure, maintained by our outstanding Facilities staff, is essential to all functions on the campus.

Additionally, when the regular session of the 89th **Texas Legislature** convenes in January 2025, we will work with our state representatives to continue to raise the visibility of UT Southwestern's many contributions to the state of Texas, and secure continued support for performance-based funding for research. UTSW is fortunate to have a constellation of supporters – alumni, friends, and philanthropists – who, along with the state, invest in our mission.

Sept. 1 marked 16 years since I wrote my first message to the campus as I started my tenure at UT Southwestern that morning. Later that year, I noted in a follow-up communication that we could not simply assert excellence but must demonstrate it daily through measurable performance. All stakeholders – the patients and families who depend on us and those who support us – expect excellence in every encounter. Our outcomes over the years and progress are evidence of our ongoing commitment to strive to meet that expectation. Whatever your role, you have helped make all that has been achieved in this past year possible. I hope you take well-deserved pride in that. I have no doubt that, together, we will continue to accomplish great things in this new academic year.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.  
President  
UT Southwestern Medical Center

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