

## Sept. 4, 2024 Campus Briefing Transcript

### Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.:

Good morning. I'm Dr. Daniel Podolsky, President of UT Southwestern Medical Center, and I welcome all of those who are listening this morning to this campus briefing as we resume in the post-Labor Day season now already in full swing. Here we are in our new academic and fiscal year, and I want to begin by welcoming all those who are new to UT Southwestern. That includes, of course, our students and other learners, our staff, and faculty. For those who are new, you may be interested to know that this is the 70th of these briefings, which began in the early months of the pandemic, and we now continue on this quarterly basis.

This morning, I would say the briefing, I hope, is a bit of a complement to the message that went out to the campus yesterday under the heading "Reflecting on FY24 Achievements and Setting Priorities for FY25." For those of you who may have missed it in the midst of other email, if you look for that heading, you'll have an opportunity to learn about the remarkable things, frankly, that the UT Southwestern community accomplished in this past year and also to see some of what we identify as priorities for the new year just begun.

And so with that, let me bring an update. I'll touch on a few of the things that were mentioned in that briefing but try to stay really focused on those things which are most current, and in that sense begin with very pleasant news of the arrival of our new Chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Dr. Antonia Chen. She joined us just yesterday from Harvard Medical School and the Brigham and Women's Hospital, where she was Chief of Arthroplasty and Joint Reconstruction and Director of Research of Arthroplasty Services. As a clinician-investigator, she specializes in hip and knee replacements and also in the study of clinical outcomes after such replacements, and we're delighted to have her leading our Department of Orthopaedics. I don't want to miss the opportunity to thank Dr. Dane Wukich for his years as serving as our Chair of that Department since 2016.

At the end of the month, we'll welcome the arrival of our new Chair of the Department of Psychiatry, Dr. Tarek Rajji, who comes to UT Southwestern really as a homecoming. He was a former UT Southwestern trainee, but for many years has been on the faculty at the University of Toronto, where he is a Professor of Psychiatry and also leads Geriatric Psychiatry at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, which is the largest mental health teaching hospital in Canada.

Here, too, I want to thank Dr. Carol Tamminga, who has served for more than 16 years as our Chair of Psychiatry, and she hands off the baton at a really important time, when we look to the completion of the construction of the Texas Behavioral Health Center at UT Southwestern, the first state psychiatric hospital in North Texas, which UT Southwestern has been charged by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission with planning, overseeing construction, and ultimately the operations of that hospital when it's completed later in the next calendar year. So we thank Dr. Tamminga for all of her leadership and welcome Dr. Rajji at this really important time when we have the opportunity to change the trajectory of the availability of care for those suffering from the most severe psychiatric and behavioral illnesses.

I'll turn to another topic, which I want to frame as anything but a goal in and of itself, but nonetheless, I think the UT Southwestern community can take pride in as a marker of their commitment to providing the very best care possible to patients who come and give us the privilege of their trust for their health care. I'm referring here to the most recent *U.S. News and World Report* rankings for hospitals, which were published a little earlier in the summer. As, I certainly hope by now, many of you have already heard, UT Southwestern was identified as the No. 1 hospital in Dallas-Fort Worth for the eighth year in a row and notably nationally ranked in

11 specialties – more specialties than any other hospital in Texas making that group of the top 50. To put that in some perspective, the rankings evaluate more than 4,500 hospitals. So it gives you some sense of the significance of the benchmark, particularly as ... those evaluations are based on highly important objective measures and outcomes. In fact, in that latter regard, in addition to those specialties, UT Southwestern was identified as being “High Performing,” which is the highest designation, in 19 out of 20 procedures and conditions.

As I’ve said before, I don’t expect anybody is getting up in the morning with the objective to obtain rankings. It’s the dedication to providing excellent care that these rankings are recognizing. And to note, that includes those who are on the front line and laying hands on the patient and everybody else who is necessary to support those efforts.

At this point, I’d like to call your attention to a season of sorts that we’re coming into that I believe is very important for us as a community to learn and to get better. And that is our engagement surveys that we have launched in past years in the early fall. This year will be a bit different. Everybody who is listening as a member of our staff will know that in past years, you’ve all received the Glint VIP, which is Values in Practice, survey, which is an opportunity to express your experience and provide insights into where UT Southwestern can be better. Once again this year, many of you will receive that same survey, and it’ll give us the opportunity both to see where we have come, hopefully improving based on those past responses, and also where we still have room for improvement. But this year as a new approach in some arenas, particularly in the Health System, instead of the VIP Glint survey, we will be distributing to you a different survey, called SCORE, which was developed by the Vizient Corp.

Vizient is a national leader in developing tools to help health systems evaluate the quality of their environment and, in particular, a real focus on knowing whether the environment supports safe care and a safe working environment. And I don’t mean just in the physical sense, but also in the sense of feeling safe to speak up when one sees some opportunity to improve and when one sees something that just doesn’t seem right to them.

So just to capsulize this, those in the Health System will be receiving this new survey, SCORE. Those throughout the rest of our UT Southwestern community will receive the VIP Glint survey. In all instances, I truly hope that you will be candid in your assessment. Know that the responses are anonymous. There is the opportunity in each of these to provide not just an answer to the question, but also to provide comments beyond the questions that are part of the formal surveys. I do assure you that we as the leadership look at these seriously. We ask every manager, particularly when we find responses are not as positive as we believe they should be, to develop plans to address the areas that we identify as opportunities.

I’ll add the final comment with respect to the SCORE survey. It is really a foundation for a broader effort to drive us collectively as an organization to be a High Reliability Organization. That is one in which we have internalized in the way we work the means to dependably achieve the best results for our patients and the best working environment for everybody who is here at UT Southwestern. And so I look forward to sharing the results of that with you and, again, just ask that you take the time to not only complete the surveys, but provide your additional comments that can help guide our plans for the future.

I’m very pleased to say that, once again, we have had a very robust response to the opening for nominations for our Leaders in Clinical Excellence Awards, more than 200, which is, I think, an indoor record for us. We have a committee, again led by Drs. Maeve Sheehan and John Mansour, who are evaluating all those nominations and have the tough job of deciding who will be the recipients, which we will announce just in a matter of weeks. We look forward to celebrating those who are identified as awardees this year in the Gooch Auditorium in November as an important part of our fall season.

In that context, I will mention what I'm really excited about as a new initiative for this new year, which is to really expand the breadth of how we endeavor to recognize great contributions. So we've had the Leaders in Clinical Excellence Awards and, also in the Health System, as those of you there will be aware, the Diana and Richard C. Strauss [Service Excellence] Awards, but we are actively involved now in developing, with input from our Employee Advisory Council and others, awards that recognize contributions and service at UT Southwestern across all the other dimensions beyond those already encompassed by those other two programs.

As the details are formalized, I look forward to sharing those with you. It'll be an opportunity for those who are contributing to be recognized, and for you to point to those you see who deserve to be celebrated. Our intention is to make those a part of an expanded Employee Appreciation Week in June, when we also celebrate lengths of service, including those who are newly eligible for our Quarter Century Club. And in that last regard, just as we are expanding the breadth of the recognition awards to staff across the campus, we are also in this new year going to recognize years of service for faculty, where in the past that has been limited to our nonfaculty staff. So more to come on both of those topics.

Now, I'd like to give you a brief update, this being the cusp of the fall respiratory virus season, for our plans with respect to vaccination. Later this month, we will kick off our annual flu vaccine campaign, and you can get your vaccine, including high-dose formulations for individuals 65 years and older, from Sept. 16 through Nov. 1 by appointment, as scheduled through the Occupational Health ReadySet platform. The vaccinations will be available at multiple locations, including Clements University Hospital, Zale Lipshy Pavilion, administrative buildings, and Professional Office Building 1 (POB1), and more specifics will be available through our campus newsletters, including this morning's *UTSW Insider*. Shots will also be available at our regional medical centers and our retail pharmacy. In those cases, we request you to use MyChart scheduling for these flu vaccines, as well as the COVID-19 vaccines to add that to the mix, so that we can minimize your waiting time. Students will receive a separate communication about the flu vaccination from Student Health Services.

And just as a reminder, our policies require that all faculty, staff, house staff, and students working or training in our clinical environments, meaning both our University Hospital and clinics or at any UTSW or affiliated clinical research sites or locations, you must receive an influenza vaccination or provide a written notice to Occupational Health that you declined for medical, religious, or personal reasons, or can document that you have received the vaccine at another site, such as a community pharmacy.

I also want to be sure you're aware that beginning next week, employees, students, and our patients may also receive the new formulation of the COVID-19 vaccine at our retail pharmacies, but this is by appointment only. Again, as I've mentioned, you can schedule this via MyChart. For those who are interested, it is our expectation to be offering both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for COVID, but we do not anticipate providing the Novavax for those who are particularly concerned to get that vaccine.

This being the fall, one of our annual initiatives is to join with other state agencies in the State Employee Charitable Campaign, an opportunity for us to come together as a community to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those less fortunate throughout Texas and beyond. And I'm delighted that year after year, we get the participation of more than 1,000 members of our campus contributing to a broad range of worthy organizations, really as aligned with your interest there. I'm grateful that Drs. Helen Yin and Marc Nivet will continue to co-chair this year. I hope once again that UT Southwestern, as a community, will have this added impact for making our communities better places to live and UT Southwestern being a cornerstone of that.

So I in past years have endeavored to keep you apprised of how we are doing as an institution in terms of our financial performance. We've completed the fiscal year '24, although it does take

a number of weeks before we're able to get to the final numbers to really have an absolute certainty around the overall performance, but the early indications are that UT Southwestern has risen to what was a challenging occasion. We knew going into the year that it was a very difficult budget environment. Expenses were rising at a rate faster than the sources of revenue that paid for those expenses were rising, and we knew it would take a lot of discipline to control our expenses and also hard work for the productivity that ultimately underlies our ability to grow our grants programs to expand our clinical services. But with a target of a very modest 0.5%, the early indications are that we will have finished the year closer to 2.5%, so that is great.

I do want, to put it in context, to say that – for a variety of reasons but, most importantly, knowing that over time one of course has to reinvest in facilities that age and need to be kept up – the long-term goal for organizations like UT Southwestern is a 3% margin. So 2.5% is certainly a great performance in the context of a goal of 0.5%. We know we still have hard work to do in this just-begun new fiscal year. To put it in perspective, we, having just completed the budget for the year, have identified a target of 1%.

So you'll appreciate from what I said a moment ago, that 1%, as hard as that will be, still is a modest goal relative to where we want to be in the long term. And so our work this year will be not only in achieving that 1%, but also finding ways to work more efficiently, to take advantage of technology, such as applications of artificial intelligence, to ultimately get to that steady state of 3%, which allows us to invest not only in facilities, but of course in the most important dimension of UT Southwestern, the people who work here.

Let me, before getting to your questions, just make note of some coming attractions, as I try to do during these briefings. The first is, I think, an important next chapter for UT Southwestern in our efforts to support the goals of our employees and that is the launch of Your Time Away, our new comprehensive leave program, which went live Sept. 1. This is the first reconfiguration of our leave program, our paid time off program, in many, many years, and was really guided by all of the feedback that we received from employees looking for greater flexibility and some additional benefit, in particular paid parental leave. I want to emphasize what I hope everybody will be aware of, from the opportunity they've had over the past several weeks to have questions addressed, that any accumulations of paid time off that were made during the prior program remain, and none of that is lost. We are now going forward accumulating the paid time off in this new format. And again, there are many resources for you to have questions answered, should you have those, as this new program is rolled out in the days and weeks ahead.

Other important coming attractions, one very timely: We are going to announce today, proudly, that UT Southwestern is the Official Founding Partner of Dallas Trinity FC, the first professional women's soccer team in Dallas. Our name is featured on the club's training jerseys for the season, which were debuted at the inaugural match last weekend at the Cotton Bowl.

And we're just a week away from the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from Sept. 15 through Oct. 15, and we'll be hosting a celebration as the highlight of Hispanic Heritage Month on Oct. 9. It's always a special event on the campus, and I hope everybody will have the opportunity to attend.

Next Saturday, Sept. 14, will mark Weight Wellness Day, a free community event here at UT Southwestern that will provide an overview in the latest advances in weight management, including everything from the newest GLP-1 medications to alternative options.

And we're just a few weeks away from the Dallas Heart Walk, which will take place on Saturday, Sept. 21. As someone who's had the pleasure of participating in that in many past years, it truly is a great event that brings out literally thousands of UT Southwestern colleagues, if this year matches last year, often with the best showing of the many, many organizations which turn out for that important community event. This Dallas Heart Walk begins at with an opening ceremony

at 8:30 in the morning followed by a walk – your choice of either 1 or 3 miles – at 9 a.m. If you haven't registered, I encourage you to join a UTSW team or sign up as an individual walker. The last day to order a custom UTSW Heart Walk T-shirt will be Sept. 17, and the money raised during the walk benefits heart disease and stroke patients and funds critical research at UT Southwestern and beyond, and I certainly encourage all of you to find the time to join that fun event on Saturday, Sept. 21.

The last week of this month marks APP Celebration Week, and I hope you'll join us in recognizing our nearly 1,000 advanced practice providers who work collaboratively with our physicians to ensure that our patients have timely access to the highest quality evidence-based care.

And finally, Oct. 1, together with Children's Health, we will celebrate the groundbreaking of the new pediatric campus. This represents the first of many exciting construction milestones for this ambitious project, which I look forward to sharing with you as we meet those milestones in the years ahead.

With that, I'm going to conclude my briefing. I do note there was a lot there to cover. I also note that in the interim, since the last briefing, we received a lot of questions, which is great. I'm going to answer as many as I can within the time we have, but as in the past, any that I don't have the opportunity to cover with Jenny Doren, who's here with me again, we will still address and post those answers so none of them go without a response.

And with that, I'll turn to you, Jenny.

**Jenny Doren, M.B.A., M.S., Vice President for Communications, Marketing, and Public Affairs:**

Thank you so much, and we will definitely post all of those responses.

We received a few questions about campus safety and security, so I want to begin with those. There is growing concern about vehicle thefts and break-ins, both on campus and at locations like Pegasus Park. Have we increased patrols in response?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Thank you and I certainly appreciate the question. I would say, first of all, that the safety of this campus – wherever it may be, not just on the main campus, but in our various satellite locations – is paramount for everybody who works here, for everybody who comes here, whether as a visitor or a patient, and I do appreciate the concern.

I would note that in absolute terms, on the South Campus, the number of auto thefts in this last year was actually down from the year before. That's not to say any theft would be acceptable, as we try to keep a safe environment. I do note, given the question was in particular focused on Pegasus Park, that we are aware that there have been a rash of recent vehicle thefts, including two belonging to UT Southwestern employees. In response, our University Police, who routinely patrol Pegasus, albeit Pegasus is not a UT Southwestern-owned facility, have increased their rounding there. Additionally, we learned on Friday, having alerted Pegasus management to concerns, that Pegasus security has posted an additional officer at the parking entrance gate. We will remain in close contact with the management there to ensure your safety.

I also want to take this opportunity to remind anybody listening of our Safety Connection app, which lets you quickly connect with UTSW Police on campus. You can also call (214) 648-8911, and I do ask you to please report any and all suspicious or criminal activity to the University Police so they can respond and address it.

At Clements University Hospital, University Police and Health System officials, for example, recently piloted Flock cameras at those parking garages. These are specially designed to capture and analyze license plate data and will alert local law enforcement if a “wanted” vehicle pulls in. Since their implementation back in January of this year, we have seen a marked reduction in vehicle-related crimes around the hospital. So we are continuing to look for new ways to increase the safety.

I think many of you here would be interested to know that there are more than 300 security cameras on North Campus alone, where I know another employee wrote to us expressing concern about some items missing from desks. And so we will continue to focus on the safety of our campus. We have a very dedicated University Police, under the leadership of Chief Marcus Lewis, but it really also depends on your participation, alerting us to areas of concern so they can be addressed promptly.

**Jenny Doren:**

So let's stick with the topic of safety. We're also hearing of some concerns for those traveling by foot, and this is on the connector between POB1 and Clements University Hospital. Some of those concerns range from close calls with shuttle buses to a rise in homeless individuals. Are police monitoring there too?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

The short answer is yes. In fact, our University Police monitor all areas on campus to ensure they remain as safe as possible for everyone. That being said, again, if anyone witnesses an unsafe situation, especially involving pedestrians and vehicle traffic, I ask you to please get in touch with our police so they can respond quickly. And if you see someone who is on campus without official business, please contact our University Police for that as well.

**Jenny Doren:**

So another topic that continues to generate multiple questions is about housekeeping. You mentioned a contract with a new company last September, but to be honest, there seems to remain some dissatisfaction with the quality of cleaning. Are we exploring any changes with our vendor?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

I certainly appreciate this question as well, as an important one, and acknowledge we still have important progress yet to be made. Having said that, working closely with the vendor, SSC, we have seen overall significant improvement. A lot of this had to do with improvement in their workforce and working closely with our Facilities, in particular with Mr. Orlando Salazar, who has responsibility for maintaining Facilities, under the leadership of Juan Guerra, our VP for Facilities Management, and our EVP for Business Affairs, Holly Crawford. And all of them, I can tell you, have this right in the center of their radar screen.

SSC has recently undergone several organizational changes, prompted by our expectations for a higher level of service, including a new on-site director, who, to our leadership, has quickly demonstrated immediate and seems to be sustained improvement. As is typical with transitions of this nature, we continuously evaluate and refine their services to ensure that they are at the levels that are optimized and live up to the expectations that our staff and faculty should have.

Notably, in clinical areas, they are conducting daily inspections as part of a quality control program, and we have made it absolutely clear of our expectation of high cleaning standards in all facilities, but that's especially important in clinical care areas. We have documented a more

consistent level of cleanliness in these key areas, and we are prepared to address these ancillary spaces wherever they may fall short of the expectations of those working in the spaces.

I strongly encourage the campus community to communicate any concerns or requests regarding service delivery in your area. There are several ways to request services or submit feedback. You can use FAMIS, our user-friendly service request system, or contact the service request operations team directly at 83375 to submit service or work requests or provide feedback. So again, that number is 83375.

**Jenny Doren:**

Appreciate that. Recently the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency over mpox. Is UT Southwestern part of a task force? And what plans are in place should an outbreak occur in North Texas?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

So first of all, just to provide some perspective, the risk from this current outbreak of the clade I mpox, which has been focused in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and surrounding areas, is currently very low. That said, we do continue to track mpox cases within ID and Infection Prevention and Control, and we are aware of the new cases of clades in Africa as well as some of the spillover to a few countries in Europe. At this point, there are no plans for a command center or that type of response for mpox, but we will continue to monitor the situation, collaborating with our county health department to be alert early to any need to change that posture. I should note that UT Southwestern, along with Parkland Memorial Hospital, is a site for the randomized clinical trial looking at the use of an antiviral called TPOXX for mpox cases, and we have been enrolling patients in that for the past several years.

Also, to assure you of our readiness to address a rising level of concern for a spillover in our local area, we have the capabilities to test, isolate, and treat any patient who may come through with concern for mpox. And we've recently reinforced education on when we should suspect mpox in patients we may see at any of our Emergency Departments or other health care facilities. We continue to encourage those who are in high-risk groups and are eligible to receive a vaccination against mpox to receive those. Those are currently being given free at the Dallas County health department.

**Jenny Doren:**

So during your opening remarks, you spoke about the budget and some challenges our institution is facing. We also continue to receive questions related to inflation and cost of living from our employees. Can you comment on what the institution is doing to help keep up with the rising costs for employees?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Well, I'm certainly mindful that many, to one degree or another, perhaps most, are feeling the effects of rising costs, the impact of inflation, and obviously that's been the norm. And even if at times in the last months we've heard that inflation may be moderating, I think we're all still coming to grips with the inflation that has gone on in the past two years. Our focus has been first and foremost to ensure that we sustain our merit program, which we have been able to do even during the most challenging times in recent years. So yes, there's an opportunity to see an increase, but finances are such – to be very direct and as I've tried to frame in my comments in

the briefing this morning – that it's not possible outside or on top of that to make across the board increases in compensation.

I take you back to my comments about where we've landed for FY25, the new year, at a margin of 1%. We got there and not at the 3% because we have prioritized being able to maintain the merit program. And we looked, as I've already said, to the long term, to get to a point where we can have the margin that the institution needs. So we tried to build in our budget what we felt we could reasonably accommodate, but still being responsible in the overall financial management of the institution. I wish it were otherwise, but that's just the financial realities. And in the long run, our ability to assure people that their employment is secure and that we have the ability to make these merit increases, those remain priorities for us.

**Jenny Doren:**

So you mentioned merit. Another employee asked if you could briefly explain the merit system for UT Southwestern. Is each department required to provide merit raises?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Required, no, but our approach is to make available to each department an overall pool of 3% that's applied for salary and hourly full-time employees. We then look for the managers, the leaders, of those departments to make performance-based judgments on how to distribute that overall 3% for the total workforce in that area of the institution. So we look to the supervisors to determine who qualifies for the 3%, but the funds are there to ensure that if everybody is deserving of it, they are going to receive it. I will assure you that beyond the supervisors, this is ultimately viewed by myself and the Executive Vice Presidents to be sure that we are being reasonable and equitable in seeing how those merit funds are distributed and made available to our employees.

**Jenny Doren:**

So I believe we have time for one more question. We did receive a handful of questions about the possibility of reducing or eliminating the cost of parking, including for employees who have a hybrid schedule and do not drive to campus every day. Is that a possibility?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Well, first of all, some context. Our UT System policy that UT Southwestern needs to comply with requires that auxiliary operations, including Parking Services, be self-supported with revenues available to offset expenses. And as such, UT institutions, including UT Southwestern, must charge fees for services such as parking to maintain the 17 parking garages and 23 surface lots on our campus. That being said, Parking Services conducts an annual rate analysis to ensure that parking fees are comparable to other similar institutions. And we have also instituted discounted parking rates for those employees who earn less than \$50,000 per year. In addition to that discount, we have a special parking option for employees that allows for a heavily discounted parking rate for those designated as majority remote, which is to say working 20% or less on campus.

**Jenny Doren:**

Well, thank you very much, Dr. Podolsky. We very greatly appreciate your time this morning.

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Thanks, Jenny, and have a great rest of the week. Same to everybody who's listening.