

**Dec. 11, 2024 - Campus Briefing Transcript**

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Good morning. I'm Dr. Daniel Podolsky, President of UT Southwestern Medical Center, and I welcome all of you who are joining me for this campus briefing this morning, the last for calendar year 2024. It has in fact been quite a year and I think, together, we have a lot to be proud of for what has been accomplished. I'd like to begin by congratulating a number of our colleagues for recognition received for their outstanding contributions, both at the national level and right here on our campus. In October, two of our faculty members, Dr. Carlos Arteaga, Director of the Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center and Dr. David Mangelsdorf, Professor and Chair of our Department of Pharmacology, were both recognized for their contributions to advancing medical science through election to the National Academy of Medicine. This is indeed one of the highest honors for health and medicine in the United States.

With their election that brings our institutional total membership in the National Academy of Medicine to 24, far surpassing all other institutions in Texas. In September, Dr. Zhijian "James" Chen, Professor of Molecular Biology and Director of the Center for Inflammation Research received the Basic (Medical) Research Award from the Lasker Foundation. This Lasker Award has been commonly referred to as America's Nobel Prize. It does celebrate some of the most important contributions to medical science and we are truly delighted to see Dr. Chen recognized for his truly profound discoveries of the cGAS enzyme and the overall mechanisms by which cells detect DNA, which is so critical in how we are able to detect and respond to viruses and also plays a vital role in many medical conditions including a range of autoimmune diseases.

And also to take a minute to acknowledge and congratulate all of the recipients of the Leaders in Clinical Excellence Award who were celebrated last month. And in particular, I would make note of Dr. Miguel Vazquez as the 2024 recipient of the Watson Award for Clinical Excellence, our institution's highest honor for clinical care.

And with that, I'd like to mention, as an update, a really important initiative that was part of what we have accomplished together in this year, and that is around defining the opportunities that artificial intelligence provides to us to advance our mission. Over a year ago, I convened a task force led by Dr. Joan Conaway, Vice Provost and Dean of Basic Research, and Dr. Eric Peterson, Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Research, to evaluate UT Southwestern's AI strategy and organizational structure.

After a year of assessing our institutional activities, working with a group that brought a full range of perspectives to this important topic, and also gaining insights by benchmarking our efforts against those of our most esteemed peer institutions across the country, the task force has presented several recommendations for a new overarching AI strategy. And these recommendations fall into six primary areas. One,

the need for us to invest in the foundations of AI. Two, partnering with our health system affiliates to see where there are opportunities to advance both the effectiveness and the efficiency and the quality of care. Three, expanding training programs in AI so that our learners, and for that matter, all of those working here at UT Southwestern, have the opportunity to really take advantage of the possibilities AI offers across the spectrum of what we do here at our institution. Four, stimulating AI development. Five, building an organizational structure to enhance data governance. And six, creating an AI strategic oversight committee.

Having presented these findings last spring, I am pleased to report there has been a tremendous amount of activity and progress that will, I believe, over the course of the next coming years, be transformative to our education, our clinical care, and our research mission. I know, for example, that our simulation center is exploring new ways to use AI to improve the standardized assessment of medical students, including using AI to provide feedback after clinical exercise. And I congratulate all of those who were involved in these efforts to date, which have resulted in a really provocative and important publication in the constellation of those produced by the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Another initiative in exploring the novel innovative use of AI involves a method for converting clinicians' detailed notes about their patients into more structured data. A study that has eventuated has resulted in an article that has showed that AI tools like ChatGPT can successfully process large volumes of clinical notes and extract key information, supporting research and aiding clinical decision-making. And with that update on our efforts to find the best ways to advance our mission through the use of AI, let me turn to an update on our major capital projects. I'm pleased to say, as we close out the calendar year, that we are setting the foundations for the future vitality of UT Southwestern. As I hope all of you know by now, but we'll take this opportunity to remind you, that in October we celebrated a major milestone related to the new pediatric campus, the formal groundbreaking.

Almost exactly one year after the Bass Administrative and Clinical Complex demolition, we gathered at the construction site together with our colleagues and partners at Children's Health to celebrate the beginning of a new chapter for the new pediatric campus. The event was also an opportunity to announce a second \$100 million gift from the Rees-Jones family following the \$100 million gift from the Pogue family, which was announced last spring. In honoring their transformative support, one of the hospital towers, indeed, the main central tower will be named after the Rees-Jones family, following the designation of the 33-acre site surrounding the hospital and the rest of the new pediatric campus as Pogue Park.

Working closely with our partners at Children's Health, the design for most of the facility has been finalized and the rest will follow within the coming new year, including the design for the Outpatient Specialty Center as well as the Faculty and Clinical Support building, which will be essential components of the new pediatric campus along with the hospital. We do intend to wrap up this phase of planning by spring 2025, at which point I look forward to being able to share the further details for the facility. I'm also pleased to note that progress on the Texas Behavioral Health Center at UT Southwestern continues on track, if anything, some weeks ahead of schedule, with the expected

completion of construction of the adult towers in late spring of 2025 and the pediatric wing completion to follow approximately six months thereafter.

As a third major investment for the future, I had the opportunity to present plans for a Radiation Oncology facility in Fort Worth to the UT System Board of Regents earlier in November, and I'm pleased to share that they approved, with enthusiasm, our institution to proceed with finalizing the plans for the nearly \$180 million facility, which is projected to open in 2028. This facility will really provide much-needed access to these vitally important services to those who live in Fort Worth and really throughout Tarrant County. It will bring technology, which simply is not available as it is to those patients who come to our Dallas County already. The facility will include, from its opening, four new linear accelerators or LINACs, one of which is equipped with MRI-guided technology, the first of its kind in Fort Worth. As I've noted, this will fill a really urgent need for Fort Worth in having access to the very best in cancer care and from specialty care from UT Southwestern providers.

Now, not a new project, but in the spirit of facilities and how they have impacted our campus and our ability to deliver our mission, I would just like, for those who were unable to be there, to be sure you are aware of a very special day we had last Friday. Last Friday was the actual 10th anniversary of the opening of Clements University Hospital, and it was an opportunity to reflect on what that has meant for our ability to have our caregivers, that's our physicians, our nurses, our APPs, but everybody involved, in what it takes to deliver care to those who come to us for help at Clements, at the very highest level. We've pioneered new treatments and contributed to groundbreaking research as well as provided for the needs of those coming for care today. I am enormously proud of the culture that everybody within Clements and also in the other sites of care throughout this campus and at our many satellites now, which focuses on service, compassion, collaboration, and a commitment to achieving the highest standards of care, both in our outcomes and, if you will, technical expertise, but also in its focus on our patients. Truly patient-centric care. And in reflecting back on the last 10 years, we can be proud of the number of patients who have in fact benefited from that commitment. More than 275,000 patients cared for as inpatients, almost half a million seen in our Emergency Department, more than 400,000 surgeries and procedures.

And a remarkable increase in patients receiving solid organ transplants, along with this broad increase in care for those needing advanced cancer care, advanced care for really the entire spectrum of medical need. I'm grateful to our staff and faculty, both within the Health System and across the entire UT Southwestern community, who helped make us one of the truly top hospitals in the nation. And on that note, I want to turn to another important topic that really is in many ways connected to our promise to ourselves and to our patients to continue that in the future through constant commitment to quality improvement. And here I'm referring to our values and practice and score engagement surveys, which you joined and participated in in October.

I certainly want to thank all of you who did take the time to do that, more than 70%. It does allow us to understand where we are doing things that really deserve celebration, but also, and importantly, where there are opportunities to enhance what we're doing to make UT Southwestern the best place for you to do your best work. As many of you

remember, this year we did, in contrast to past years, and as I've noted, launch two surveys. For many of you, you completed the survey that has been used in past years, the Values in Practice, or VIP, survey through the Glint organization. But many of you, and, in particular, anyone who in the work they do would possibly impact a patient care environment, undertook this new survey called SCORE, which was developed by consultants Vizient, a leader in developing tools to help medical centers like ours achieve the best results for our patients and the best working environment for our people. SCORE insights, as well as VIP insights, are being collated, analyzed, and with that process nearly complete and with supervisors and managers now receiving guidance on how best to understand the results for their teams, we will soon be bringing these to you as we endeavor to be sure everybody has the benefit of understanding what we learned from the survey. So as we had done across the campus for VIP, now we'll do, depending on which survey was used for the various areas on campus, we'll be asking each to focus on the opportunities for improvement, which were identified through the results of the engagement survey, whether it's VIP or SCORE. And then we will be following to make sure that the plans that we put in place to address areas for improvement actually result in improvement. You might ask why we are putting this much effort into engagement if you want to look beyond the intrinsic importance that we feel of making this the best place possible to work.

That is with the SCORE survey actual data that says as we improve in that engagement and create a culture where, in particular, people raise their hands, speak up when seeing an opportunity to do something better, that the actual outcomes for patients improve. And so beyond that desire to make UT Southwestern a great place to work, we want to engage in this as almost an ethical obligation as a means to further improve what we do for our patients. And we will be working on this throughout the next year and, from the progress we make next year, build on it the following year. So I look forward to continue to give you updates as we continue on that journey. And I'll take a moment just to acknowledge Dr. Will Daniel, our Chief Quality Officer, who has been the champion spearheading the SCORE initiative that I've tried to describe for you in this briefing.

Now before I turn to some coming attractions, I'd like to wrap up the update by taking note that we have, as everybody will be aware, an election behind us. We will all see what will emerge from a new administration in Washington, but closer to home, in just a few weeks, the Texas Legislature will begin its 89th legislative session. We go into that session, I think, with a strong case to be made to our elected leaders for the value of investing in UT Southwestern because of what you have accomplished during this current biennium. And on that foundation, we look for continuing strong support from the legislature for our research enterprise as well as our educational and academic programs, given the important role that state support plays for that.

And we will not only be making the case for that continued and we hope expanded investment of UT Southwestern, but certainly also focusing closely on policy issues which may affect us, whether that's in our educational activities, our research activities, or in the clinical care that we provide on campus, even if the legislature and the state does not directly provide funds in support of that part of our mission.

I do want to make note in the general same theme of our status as a state agency, and therefore the guidance we take not only from the legislature but from the executives and, in particular, the governor, that he has issued an executive order, Executive Order 48, that I know many of you are aware of and concerned about, specifying limitations on public institutions of higher education as well as other state agencies with respect to interactions with nations designated by the federal government as potential adversaries. And in particular, restrictions around travel and participation in meetings that I know has raised concern, understandably, across the campus.

As the Dean has conveyed in a message to the campus, we are working closely with both legal affairs here at UT Southwestern and the Office of the General Counsel at the UT system to really understand the specific ramifications of the Executive Order 48 so that we can provide guidance to you. So as much as I would have hoped that I could provide that guidance, if not now, sooner than now, just be assured that this is being looked at very closely knowing the importance of the issue to so many of you.

And with that, I want to turn to a few coming attractions, one of which will take place here on the Campus on Saturday. And that is the 2024 Commencement for the School of Health Professions. One hundred and thirty-five students in that celebration will receive their degrees across six academic programs. The graduates will be hearing from Dr. Sherry Huang, our relatively newly arrived Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Education, who is also a nationally recognized medical educator and physician-scientist.

And I also want to look ahead to next month, the new year, when we will celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday on January 23. It'll be a very special commemorative celebration in which the keynote speaker will be Ron Kirk, former mayor of the city of Dallas, and also the U.S. trade representative under President Obama's administration. And I know that he'll bring important insights that will really carry the spirit of MLK Jr.'s legacy and one that will not only be there for the day, but insights I'm sure that will resonate throughout the year.

A coming attraction which I look forward to discussing in certainly greater detail at our next briefing is a new award program to recognize the great work that's being done across all parts of this campus. I made note early in this update of the 2024 Leaders in Clinical Excellence Award. We know there's excellence in delivering on all aspects of our mission and also in manifesting the attributes that we celebrate, like compassion, like innovation, like teamwork.

And working together with the leadership in our human resources, Jeremy Falke, your representatives on the Employee Advisory Council, I am truly excited by a program whose details are still being finalized to be shared in the new year for launching this program in conjunction with the 2025 Employee Recognition Week, which we'll celebrate in June. So that's a coming attraction that I certainly look forward to sharing in greater detail at our next briefing.

And now to conclude and before turning to Jenny Doren, who once again is here with me this morning to share the questions that you have forwarded ahead of this morning. I want to take the opportunity to really add to what I hope was a letter you received on the cusp of Thanksgiving, expressing my deep gratitude for your service and commitment to UT Southwestern, by offering you the very best wishes for a truly joyous holiday season

and for the coming new year. I feel fortunate every day that I come to the campus for what I witness in the compassion, the kindness, the commitment to excellence, whether it is in teaching our learners or in working on the important unmet medical needs through our discovery and through the care we provide to our patients. And with that, I'm going to conclude my remarks and turn to Jenny.

**Jenny Doren:**

Well, thank you very much, Dr. Podolsky, and I want to thank everyone listening for their continued engagement as we come up on five years, if I'm doing my math correctly of these briefings. I'm going to start today by addressing continued housekeeping concerns, which I know we have spoken about a few times. Somebody wrote us asking if there was any update to our housing or housekeeping contract.

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Well, I certainly thank the writer for the question, knowing this has been an issue of concern in these past years as we have worked with contractors to bring the custodial services across all of our facilities up to the level that everybody here should expect. And I don't want anybody to have any doubt that we in the administration, and I'll say in particular, Holly Crawford is our EVP for Business Affairs, who has the responsibility for this, among many others for our campus, are committed to keeping the work environment clean and well maintained. So we take these concerns regarding the cleanliness of the facilities and collection very seriously. Orlando Salazar, Director of Building Maintenance and Operations did provide me an update on the work being done to address the service inconsistencies, and we recently partnered with an external audit firm specializing in custodial assessment. Yes, there are such firms, to help us evaluate our current program and make recommendations.

We hope now that they are doing that, they will identify as a source of some of these issues and create an actionable implementation strategy for resolving the service quality. I would ask that if you encounter any problems or experience a lack of service, please continue to submit a service request through our new facilities asset management and information system. You can find it on the internal UT Southwestern intranet by clicking the Administration tab and selecting the Facility's Management link. It is critical in helping us resolve, as immediately as possible, any issues and to track where there are areas of deficiency. Alternatively, you can speak with a representative by calling the facility service desk at 648-3375. Again, I want to emphasize this is a front of mind. We are working while we're getting that audit with the contractor working to ensure that they bring in where we see deficiencies, new personnel, new supervisors who can deliver on the standard that we expect and you should expect us to deliver.

**Jenny Doren:**

So another topic that has generated repeat questions is that of financial performance. Could you provide an update on the current state of our institutional budget?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Well, this is certainly something that I would understand and hope would be important to everybody on the campus. Just to provide some context, through a lot of great effort by faculty and staff throughout the institution, we put together a budget for 2025. That is say the fiscal year that actually began at September 1, 2024. That aim (is) to generate a 1% margin that is say 1% greater revenue than we had total expenses. And feeling that that itself would take hard work. It was nothing like what somebody might think of as a walkover goal. It really would take hard work.

And it's clear through the first two months of the year that that hard work has been there and has paid off. We've been helped also by moderating inflation. And in the clinical arena, there is some improvement in the reimbursement rates through contract negotiations with the insurance companies. And in fact, we've surpassed that margin for the first two months and in fact saw one that is, depending on how one accounts for some of the expenses that we know are coming but don't necessarily come within the first two months of the year, probably is not just 1%, but 3% to 5%.

We are now getting into December with this briefing. We do not yet have the analysis of the financial performance for November. We're hoping it continues in that same trend. And if it does, it does I think create the opportunity for us to look at where we might have out of the necessity of being sure we had a responsible budget, have deferred expenses and initiatives that we otherwise would've liked to have done, that we might now consider being able to fund. So I want to just in concluding this response to the question, thank everybody. It didn't happen by magic. It happened by hard work and discipline that we are ahead of our budget. We've got to do that again each month through the year. But with that, we have the opportunity to consider where are ways in which we can spend some of those resources to enhance the performance of our campus for this fiscal year.

**Jenny Doren:**

Certainly some promising news. I want to stay on the topic of budget. Several employees have written and they have shared the strain of inflation and the cost of living on their personal budgets. Is there anything new that UT Southwestern is doing to help employees?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Well, I certainly do understand that this has been a tough time for people in their personal lives as they've experienced what we've experienced as an institution. Inflation is going at a rate faster than revenue comes in. And we did set going back to the thinking in putting together our budget for the current fiscal year as a high priority, as our first priority, at least maintaining a merit program, which we were in fact able to do. We are mindful that we need to be sure we are being competitive in our compensation. And I would say with the performance, assuming it has been sustained again through November, one of the first things we'll look at is where there may be the need to look at gaps relative to the market. And so that's what we'll be considering as we get into January. But I certainly wouldn't want anybody here in our campus community to have any doubt that we understand that that is a true challenge that so many are facing.

**Jenny Doren:**

Appreciate that. In your opening remarks, you mentioned the 10th anniversary of CUH. As we look ahead to the next decade, is there any update on whether we're going to hire a CEO for the University Hospital?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Thank you for the question for which I can give a pretty straightforward answer, and that is yes. Dr. Jon Efron, our EVP for Health System Affairs, celebrated his one-year anniversary coincident with the Clements University 10th-year anniversary. And as Dr. Efron has worked through that first year to really, if you will, wrap his arms around the breadth as well as the depth of all of our Health System activities, both our own hospital and clinics and of course our faculty practice as we care for patients not only at UT Southwestern facilities, but at our partners as well.

He has I know given very careful thought to the ways in which we might enhance how we're organized at a number of different levels, but at the leadership level for a thriving, growing Health System that we have at UT Southwestern. And one of the changes that he has come to see as important is indeed to have a dedicated CEO for Clements University Hospital working within the team of leaders that is also considering the breadth of what we do as a Health System. And that search has been launched. It's going to be a national search. We believe it ought to be able to attract outstanding candidates given what an outstanding hospital we have here at UT Southwestern.

**Jenny Doren:**

Very, very exciting. Shifting gears, we received a question related to the psychological safety of our employees. Someone raised concern about not having a way to report if they have behavior concerns regarding their supervisors. Can you talk about what mechanisms we have in place for these types of issues?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Well, I'm certainly grateful that somebody has asked because as I highlighted in my remarks in the celebration last Friday of Clements University Hospital, for all that we should celebrate, when we see something that needs changing, something that's not right, whether that's anybody and certainly including behaviors in a supervisor, not only can you, should you, you really, in my view, are obligated to raise your hand. And we have the mechanisms to do that, understanding it's not necessarily going to be comfortable to do that, if you will, in person. And so we have the mechanisms to raise the concerns, whether it's with a supervisor or anybody else, a colleague, anywhere you see something wrong, to do that within the psychological comfort of anonymity, knowing it will be evaluated.

So I want to emphasize the chain of command has absolutely no bearing on the importance we place on maintaining an environment that reinforces, supports wellness and safety, both physical and psychological. And we take any indication of threats, again, psychological and certainly physical as well, very seriously. Last spring we launched the SAFE initiative, which is designed for the scenarios that I think are being raised by the question. SAFE is a behavioral intervention initiative that provides



reporting avenues for concerning behaviors exhibited by staff, faculty, learners, trainees, contractors, and vendors. As part of this initiative, we have established a confidential online web form, email, and hotlines as different vehicles to report concerning behaviors, which are then reviewed by this SAFE unit. That includes those who have the professional expertise to really assess the behaviors that are being described.

More information about the SAFE initiatives, including the links to the reporting tools and hotline numbers, can be found on our intranet. And just to remind you, and as I was alluding to in my first comments addressing this question, in addition, there are other options, including the confidential compliance hotline and filing a grievance with HR employee relations. And all of those are there because we want to make sure that whatever the circumstance and however one might be hesitant or concerned, a means to surface potential problems of this nature. Then finally, as equally important, not only do we have policies, but these are policies we take extraordinarily seriously that preclude retaliation aimed at anybody who raises concerns of the sort that we're describing with the expectation that concerns are raised in good faith.

**Jenny Doren:**

I'm going to try to squeeze in two more questions if you have time, the first being about the dining room on ND14. Are there plans to resume lunch service?

**Dr. Podolsky:**

The answer is yes, at least on a limited basis. We will be launching a new buffet lunch to begin with on Wednesdays. I have to say that this has been I know frustrating for some who are working there on North Campus who did use it on a regular basis, but through COVID as we track the actual utilization, it was very minimal and to come back to my comments about our budget earlier in this update, had to be figured in when we're making tough choices as it was enormously expensive to the institution to maintain it relative to the utilization. But as there is more demand for that, we will be monitoring and we'll see how we do. But we're going to begin by, as I've said, beginning that service on Wednesdays and we are going to be conducting regular reviews probably on a quarterly basis to assess utilization. And as there is a reasonable need there, we will expand accordingly. Just to be more specific, the service will begin on January 29 and there'll be more details in the UTSW *Insider* as we get closer to that date.

**Jenny Doren:**

Thank you and I appreciate you talking about psychological safety. We'll end on a question about public safety: "Really concerned for pedestrians crossing major roads, like walking from the parking garage at Clements University Hospital to the Emergency Department. What is really being done to ensure those traveling by foot remain safe?"

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Well, our officers under Chief Marcus Lewis focus on speed control and crosswalk enforcement at our most high traffic areas, which include Record Crossing, Forest Park, and Inwood Road. And those are the areas, not to the exclusion of all others, but those

are the areas that are the most problematic as they have tracked incidents and just through observation. But if you're experiencing concern in other parts of the campus, I encourage you to alert UTPD, University of Texas Police Department, here at UT Southwestern so they can take appropriate action. As for this example, we will ensure that our officers have a presence to slow down speeding drivers and ensure crosswalk safety now that that's been highlighted as a specific area of concern.

**Jenny Doren:**

Thank you very much, Dr. Podolsky. I appreciate your time this morning.

**Dr. Podolsky:**

Thank you, Jenny, and wish you also a very happy rest of the holiday season and a happy New Year.