

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER
The College of Medicine

Dear Colleagues,

September 29, 2009

On October 1 our Chancellor and long-time COM colleague and leader, Dr. H. Pat Wall, will step down as 11th Chancellor of UTHSC. At that time, I will become the interim Chancellor while retaining the Executive Dean position in COM, and Dr. J. Lacey Smith will become the interim Dean of the COM Memphis campus. Dr. Wall has agreed to stay on and lend his talents as Special Assistant to the President in support of Alumni Affairs and Development. UT President Simek has noted a national search for a permanent Chancellor is to begin immediately.

As the Executive Dean I will continue to confer with and support the efforts of Dean Seaberg (COM Chattanooga), Dean Neutens (COM Knoxville) and, now, Dean Smith (COM Memphis). Further, as Executive Dean I will remain as the Chair of the UT Medical Group Board of Directors and continue my role with our affiliated faculty practices. As interim Chancellor of UTHSC I look forward to challenges associated with maximizing our financial resources, including issues associated with the stimulus money and state budget reductions, to best meet our missions. Also, as Chancellor, a top priority will be addressing desperately needed building renovations and the possibility of a new research building on the Memphis campus.

Dr. J. Lacey Smith, Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs, is an exceptional choice for our interim Dean of the COM Memphis campus. Dr. Smith skillfully guided the Memphis campus Department of Internal Medicine through challenging times as interim Chair from 2006-2008. He is noted for his abilities as a leader, exemplary character, and dedication to education and quality patient care. I publically offer my personal thanks and that of the entire College to Lacey for taking on this job.

In addition to acknowledging these transitions, in this newsletter I want to finish presenting plans to move COM into the top quartile in the clinical, education, and research arenas. In the June and July newsletters I presented our progress and strategies for the education and clinical missions. Now, I want to put forward for your consideration our research progress, goals, and strategies as we move toward the top quartile in research.

In critically looking at where we are right now in research, I see a number very promising signs. In brief:

- The Cancer Research Building, floors 1-3, is near capacity with funded investigators.
- The Regional Biocontainment Lab is coming online.
- UT Center for Integrative and Translational Genomics (CITG) received significant funding for translational genomics.
- We have formalized and increased interactions with Oak Ridge National Laboratory.
- UT Research Foundation is on the Memphis campus and responsive to invention/patent needs.
- The departments of Physiology and Anatomy & Neurobiology have placed high in national rankings.
- In this summer alone, COM faculty have been involved in over 90 publications indexed in Pubmed. These publications are typically in top tier journals. The breadth of biomedical research and health-related topics covered in these articles is impressive.
- Many of COM's PIs have cornered stimulus grant dollars.
- With respect to grant funding, we currently have >\$40 million in NIH/DOD/DOE funding, \$8 million in VA funding, and >30 million in non-federal funds.
- FY 2010 will be a very good grant year for the COM

However, in examining our grant funding as a function of time, it is at best flat over the last 5 years if we exclude FY 2010. Although the stimulus grant influx gives a significant blip on the radar, these funds are time limited. As such, to meet the challenge of flat to falling funding over the long term, we have identified 2 absolute necessities. First, we must retain our existing, productive researchers. Second, we must increase the number of funded investigators by recruiting 5+ new scientists/year.

The campus has formulated and is moving to execute a strategic research plan. The stimulus funds we receive will, by and large, be used to drive our research mission. However, we must move beyond the stimulus monies to develop a sustainable research growth strategy.

To meet our goals a number of strategies are being pursued:

- A key to faculty retention is to adequately compensate faculty for their efforts. As such, a research incentive plan must be maintained.
- To bring in new research investigators, we must identify sources of funds that will be used for their competitive start-up packages. Initially, this will be with stimulus funds.
- In order to have sustainable research growth, we must have a way to replenish financial reserves used in research recruits. As such, we have entered into negotiations with the Chancellor's office on returning a portion of grant indirect costs directly to the research efforts.
- In order to house a growing research program, we must have additional space. As such, we have gotten the go ahead for a research building to be paid for with loans procured by UTHSC. The plan is to fill this building with funded investigators whose indirect's on grants pay the building debt service.
- In order to support significant research growth, we must continue to use fiscal common sense to support what works, and change or discontinue what does not work.

In summary, transition is here, but our growth plans in research, education, and clinical productivity continue to go forward. The national and state budget shortfalls are major challenges that will be with us for several more years. We will see another reduction in our state appropriation next year that will force us to make additional painful adjustments. However, as with any decent plan, adjustments are continually being made to reflect the changing climate. Our commitment to maintaining our upward trajectory is undiminished.

That being said, I sincerely welcome your suggestions on how to further strengthen our college.

Steve J Schwab, MD

Executive Dean, College of Medicine

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The e-mail address to send in comments, suggestions, and questions to Dr Schwab is COM@utm.edu