

Willerson Provides Health Science Center Update at Medical School

During an update session for all Medical School faculty, staff and students, James T. Willerson, M.D., president of the UT Health Science Center at Houston, provided early morning and late afternoon briefings June 28 at the school.

At both sessions, all in attendance received a comprehensive update covering topics such as fund-raising activities, legislative outcomes, recruitment of new scientists, current and future construction plans within the health science center, Brown Foundation Institute of Molecular Medicine for the Prevention of Human Diseases (IMM), Texas Heart Institute, and much more.

Noting his confidence in the leadership of the deans of each of the six schools, Willerson emphasized a continual theme of raising the bar to make outstanding programs even better. High on his list for raising that bar is an aggressive construction program that includes much needed research space.

"The Coordinating Board says we (UT Health Science Center at Houston) are 800,000 square feet below our research space needs," he noted, while itemizing a long list of campus growth initiatives. Those include the Medical School's new Research Replacement Building, recently completed

School of Nursing and Student Community Center, and the Sarofim Research Building that will open next spring to house the IMM. Additionally, the university is planning new buildings for the Mental Sciences Institute and the Dental Branch. And, he reminded the audience of his efforts to secure Tuition Revenue Bond funding for the new clinic building now owned by the UT Health Science Center.

Recruiting additional faculty identified as among the world's best in their fields is essential for our future, Willerson noted. These world's best scientists, he said, will complement the health science center's outstanding faculty, including the only Nobel Laureate of Medicine and Physiology in residence in the Texas Medical Center, and will help in many ways to define the institution's future.

Of the \$7 million requested in the last session of the Texas Legislature for recruiting world's best scientists, we received \$2.5 million annually to add to the \$3 million annually received two years ago. "We are already talking to some outstanding individuals about joining our enterprise," he said.

On the topic of university leadership, Willerson affirmed his working relationship with Chief Operating Officer Mike McKinney,

M.D. Willerson noted that as president, he is accountable for the university's success or failure, and while he works closely with McKinney, the chief operating officer is responsible for implementing Willerson's decisions.

- On a related topic, Willerson emphasized his accountability to the UT System Board of Regents, and the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs. He emphasized his dedication to both the UT Health Science Center, with all of its six schools, and the Texas Heart Institute, where he currently serves as president-elect. "I don't plan to go anywhere," he said. "I want to keep doing what I'm doing and be helpful."
- In an effort to answer questions about fundraising, Willerson discussed the challenge of asking donors for financial contributions, noting that even with a vision and a person they believe in, donors are not always inclined to give. Willerson has an impressive track record of cultivating private donors — many of them his own cardiology patients. His fund-raising efforts have translated into \$193 million in private philanthropy for the UT Health Science Center over the last three years.
- Willerson also explained that his vision for the IMM — which he conceived in 1989 as he came to the UT Medical School

as chairman of internal medicine — was rooted in the belief that a new institute not tied to any one school would benefit from financial management by a director not burdened with issues outside the IMM and from opportunities for collaboration with multiple UT schools and other Texas Medical Center institutions.

The June 28 update was the first of a new noontime President's Forum series during which Willerson will talk with health science center faculty and staff.

President's Forums

Wednesday, Aug. 17 — Institute of Molecular Medicine, Second Floor Auditorium

Wednesday, Aug. 31 — UT Harris County Psychiatric Center Auditorium

Thursday, Sept. 8 — School of Public Health Auditorium

Wednesday, Sept. 14 — Dental Branch, Room 207

Wednesday, Sept. 28 — University Center Tower, Room 1505C

Thursday, Sept. 29 — School of Nursing and Student Community Center, Auditorium

Wednesday, Dec. 14 — Operations Center Building, Room 2200. ★

Centennial Ceremony Highlights HSC Commencement Line-Up

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"doctors" in the families made their mothers proud.

— *Erika Durham*

Medical School

The University of Texas Medical School at Houston celebrated its annual 32nd annual commencement May 28 at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

One hundred and eighty seniors received their medical degrees during the ceremony, which featured guest speaker Catherine DeAngelis, M.D., editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and editor-in-chief of the AMA Division of Scientific Information and Multimedia.

DeAngelis had sage advice for the graduates — to use their intellect for wisdom and take great responsibility in the power they have as physicians.

"Think of yourself as a healer," DeAngelis said. "That's what you are. Patients may not remember your face or what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel. Make them feel good. You may not be able to cure



L-R, Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs Kenneth Shine, M.D., UT System Regent H. Scott Caven, and President James T. Willerson, M.D., of the UT Health Science Center, share a moment of conversation during the Dental Branch festivities.

them, but you can always make them feel good."

Stanley G. Schultz, M.D., dean of the UT Medical School, echoed DeAngelis' remarks and reminded graduates to responsibly manage the awesome power that comes with a doctor's right to invade the minds and bodies of others.

Class president Craig Messick said Tropical Storm Allison and Sept. 11 united his fellow classmates as Americans and as a class. Beyond

lessons from textbooks, four years of medical school taught them life lessons in team building, leadership and success.

"We learned that you cannot change the wind, but you can always adjust the sails," Messick said.

— *Meredith Raine*

School of Public Health

Nearly 70 students from 12 countries were

awarded degrees from The University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston at the 35th annual graduation ceremony May 6 at the TMC Edwin Hornberger Conference Center.

Students were recognized by Guy S. Parcel, Ph.D., UT School of Public Health dean, and James T. Willerson, M.D., UT Health Science Center president, for earning graduate and doctoral degrees in the theory and practice of public health.

"I'm extremely proud of you and the school of public health," said Willerson. "Enjoy this day and realize what it has taken to get here. Realize this is not the end of anything, but the beginning. You have the talent, respect and opportunity to do something special in your lives."

Commencement Speaker Darwin R. Labarthe, M.D., Ph.D., associate director for Cardiovascular Health Policy and Research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and former SPH epidemiology professor, emphasized the significance of future public health leaders. "Public health holds itself responsible for (society's) health and that responsibility must be fulfilled by the work that we do," Labarthe said. ★

— *Melanie Hillis*

Lack of Resources and Faculty Cause Nurse Shortage, Says Starck

By Shannon Rasp, Public Affairs

Contrary to popular belief, America's nursing shortage cannot be blamed on a lack of women and men wanting to be nurses, says prominent nursing educator Patricia L. Starck, D.S.N., dean of The University of Texas School of Nursing at Houston. Instead, the problem can be traced to a lack of space and resources to train all of the people who want to become nurses, along with an ever-shrinking pool of people willing and able to turn down higher-paying nursing jobs to become educators.

"Texas nursing schools turned away 4,200 qualified applicants last year because they lacked the faculty, equipment and space with which to educate them," said Starck. "Our school alone had to turn away 10 applicants for every one we accepted, because of limited resources."

Texas is far below the national average of the nurse-to-population ratio of 782 nurses per 100,000 population in the US. In Texas, the ratio is 609 nurses per 100,000 people. By some estimates, Texas will need 138,000 additional nurses in the next seven to 10 years.

Widespread media coverage of the criti-

cal need for qualified nurses and Johnson & Johnson's \$20 million, multi-year campaign to attract more people to the nursing field have triggered a boom in the number of applicants to nursing programs.

Over the last five years, the school's applicant pool has increased 247 percent, resulting in a large number of qualified, motivated aspiring nurses unable to get into school.

Even though its entrance requirements are extremely high — including a 3.7 grade point average in previous college classes, letters of recommendation, extensive science prerequisites, and in-person interviews — the school still had to deny entry this year to over 1,200 people who met all of the requirements.

"It's frustrating," said Starck. "We are trying new things to increase the number of students we can educate, including an accelerated nursing program, using hospital nurses as on-the-job educators, and many other programs, but there is only so much we can do. We've increased the number of bachelor of nursing students we graduate by 56 percent over the last five years, but there's still a criti-

cal nursing shortage. Without an increase in state funding, we won't be able to solve this problem. Add in the fact that we can't pay faculty members as much as the private sector can, and we are really stuck," she said.

By the time nurses have acquired enough knowledge to be nursing educators, they are earning much more than a university can pay. That means that many people who would otherwise be interested in teaching cannot enter academia because of financial considerations.

"Every \$150,000 spent annually on a faculty member and their classes, allows us to train 10 more students," said Starck, who has been dean of the UT School of Nursing at Houston since 1984. "We know how much it costs to train a student, and increased state funding would be an economic investment in educating Texans for jobs that are ready and waiting."

Daniel Stoneking, who just completed his first year of nursing school, knows this all too well. After completing two years of core requirements at Texas A&M University, Stoneking applied to the UT School of Nursing at Houston, explicitly because it is

so highly ranked. His grades were excellent, he had glowing letters of recommendation, and he did well in his personal interview. So Stoneking was stunned to find out that he had been wait-listed for the school.

"I honestly didn't know what to think," he said. "I had wanted to be a nurse for years, and being wait-listed shocked me. I soon found out I was actually lucky — other friends of mine were rejected, even though we were all qualified. I stuck with it, calling the school for updates and basically just being persistent. Luckily, just before school started, a space opened up and I was next on the list. The school called me immediately, and two weeks later I started nursing school."

The prospect of motivated, qualified, caring students like Stoneking not becoming nurses because there is nowhere for them to go to learn is especially troubling to Starck. "It takes a special person to be a good nurse," she said. "And the fact that every year, thousands of these smart and caring people are prevented from reaching their dream through no fault of their own is very frustrating." ★