

## Governmental Roadblocks Are No Match for the Office of International Affairs

By Leslie Gerber, *Institutional Advancement*

Rose Mary Valencia, director of the Office of International Affairs, has been clearing roadblocks for international visitors to The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston for more than 27 years.

Her invaluable experience in international immigration has resulted in a prestigious appointment to the newly created Secure Borders and Open Doors Advisory Committee, where she will advise the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The committee will address a major challenge — how to preserve the numerous advantages of international exchanges while responding to heightened security concerns in the aftermath of 9/11.

Valencia's office, which also serves the UT M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, has been grappling with the increased complexity of visa regulations and law enforcement issues in recent years. This more stringent climate, she says, can cause lengthy delays and increased stress for those who go through the process. The UT community feels the impact when clinical services or research programs are interrupted and fewer international patients choose to come here for their treatment.

Valencia looks forward to her work on the committee, hoping to find solutions on a national level to the same kinds of issues she faces in Texas. She wants a better

answer for topnotch students or employees who question their decision to come to the United States for work or study when they can go elsewhere and avoid delays and hassle.

The title of the committee is apt, according to Valencia. "The issue we are trying to address is how to keep the doors to the nation open without compromising important security interests," she says.

The 18-member committee, which held its inaugural meeting in Washington, D.C., in December, includes national leaders in the hospitality arena, academia and health care.

Recommendations are likely to include provisions for a smoother entry process at airports, with Houston and Dulles airports developing a prototype, measures to eliminate delays for students and others who need visas and actions to ensure that visitors have a positive experience while here.

These goals mesh with the approach taken by Valencia and her staff of 11 advisors, as they do all they can to add the human touch to a bureaucratic process. They are well trained in meeting requirements for a half-dozen types of visas and are well-versed in all the compliance issues for The University of Texas System institutions throughout the state. They work hard to facilitate the visa process,

a free service to those coming to participate in work or study at UT. Valencia says this allows many to come who would not be able to afford the legal representation that is usually essential to obtaining a visa. Each year they help about 8,000 individuals from more than 130 countries.

Valencia's department has helped to smooth the way for a population of international students who add significantly to the diversity and intellectual vibrancy of the academic programs at the UT Health Science Center, according to L. Maximilian Buja, M.D., executive vice president for academic affairs. "Rose Mary's balance of compassion, good sense and patriotism permits her to do both what is best for the country and for the students," Dr. Buja says.

The work has become even more complex with new security regulations and the potential at any time for queries from law enforcement agencies. Which means knowing where to find the individuals she serves at any given moment has its benefits: "Often, good communication



Rose Mary Valencia, Director, Office of International Affairs

with these agencies prevents the necessity of personal contact between the agency and the visiting student or professional," Valencia says.

She finds it rewarding to pave the way to this country by facilitating the visa process. There's nothing cut and dried about this work for her, when she knows that people's lives and important programs hang in the balance during the visa process. Each type of

visa comes with its own set of stringent regulations that must be carefully observed, and the quotas are miniscule compared to the demand.

When Luis Ostrosky-Zeichner, M.D., associate professor in Internal Medicine, Infectious Diseases at the Medical School, had issues related to a change in his visa status, he says it was Valencia's dedication and perseverance that eased his transition from foreign student from Mexico to Medical School faculty member. "Her expertise, kindness and compassion," he says, "helped me and my wife (a U.S. citizen) as we struggled to obtain the visa that would allow me to work here and

*Continued on Page 4*

## Stephen Laman, D.D.S., Named Director of UT Dentists

By Erika Hargrove, *Dental Branch*



Stephen Laman, D.D.S., (right) gives a tour of the UT Dentists clinic to Brent King, M.D., interim chief operating officer of the UT Health Science Center at Houston. Photo by Brian Schnupp

Stephen Laman, D.D.S., has been named the director of UT Dentists — the faculty practice of The University of Texas Dental Branch at Houston. Dr. Laman

will take the reigns from Thomas Servos, D.D.S., who has served as interim director of the practice since May 2005.

"We appreciate the leadership of Dr. Thomas

Servos during the start-up phase of UT Dentists," said Catherine M. Flaitz, D.D.S., dean of the Dental Branch. "Dr. Servos was extremely instrumental in the development of the plan's administration, operations and facility.

"We are looking forward to the next phase of the practice. We know Dr. Laman will provide the leadership needed to make UT Dentists an excellent contemporary, multidisciplinary practice."

Dr. Laman is a 1986 graduate of the UT Dental Branch and practiced dentistry on Houston's west side for 16 years. In 1996 he joined the Dental Branch as a part-time volunteer clinical faculty member and six years later joined the school faculty full-time.

Prior to being named UT Dentists director, Dr. Laman was assistant professor of Restorative Dentistry responsible for the management and clinical supervision of 16 senior dental students. He also is the course director for the senior

clinical periodontics course.

"Since we began discussing and planning our faculty practice, I have been extremely thrilled," Dr. Laman says. "Now that we have the practice in place, many of those dreams and hopes have come to fruition, and it is even more exciting to have the opportunity to work in the practice.

"I am looking forward to our being known for our excellent quality dentistry, a very compassionate and professional atmosphere, and consummate skill and expertise. I want to challenge all of our staff, providers, clinicians and administrators to work hard and continue to grow in their skills and abilities so that we can be identified as one of the premier health-care facilities in the city of Houston."

For more information about the leadership at UT Dentists or to make a dental appointment, call 713-500-4200. ★

### Inside:

Kozar New MH-TMC Trauma Chief.....	2
New Medical School	
Geriatrics Division.....	2
SON Professor to MH-TMC.....	2
SON's Mackey Appointed.....	2
Sensitive Information.....	3
Proper use of Info Tech.....	3
News Briefs.....	3
Calendar.....	4
Stars.....	4
Correction.....	4

### Upcoming Events

#### Living Smart Conference

UT Dentists and UT Physicians will provide a variety of health screenings and the Office of Institutional Advancement will provide information about the UT Health Science Center at the Living Smart conference, sponsored by Houston PBS-Channel 8, Saturday, Feb. 17, at the Westin Galleria Hotel. The conference will focus on women's health and well-being. For ticket information, visit <http://www.houstonpbs.org/conference>.

#### International Programs Awards applications

The Office of International Programs is accepting applications for the International Programs Award, which recognizes our faculty and students actively engaged in international collaboration. The awards provide funding to worthwhile international collaboration and increase awareness of the importance of international programs. The application deadline is March 15. For application information, visit <http://www.uth.tmc.edu/internationalprograms/oipaward.htm>.



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HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER  
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