

# UT Southwestern Medical Center

## Introducing the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health

March 1, 2022

To the UT Southwestern Community:

I am writing today to share the wonderful news that the O'Donnell Foundation, established by the late visionary philanthropists Peter and Edith O'Donnell, has made a \$100 million gift to UT Southwestern to endow and support our new School of Public Health. This remarkable investment is the largest gift to a School of Public Health at a public university in the U.S. and matches the third largest gift supporting any School of Public Health. In recognition of their generosity, UT Southwestern has named the new school the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health.

Peter and Edith O'Donnell understood the vital role of academic medicine in addressing the health challenges facing society. No one has been more generous in their support of UT Southwestern than the O'Donnells and their Foundation, having gifted more than \$400 million to support many of our most innovative and impactful initiatives over the past four decades. The majority of the funds of this latest gift will create an endowment to provide stable support for the new school's research and educational programs. The balance of the gift funds will be used to support recruitment of new faculty and the school's programmatic initiatives.

As Dr. Lee and I shared in a Campus Update last year, this new school, which was approved by the UT System Board of Regents in February 2021, is intended to both advance public health broadly through research and meet the need for an expanded expert public health workforce. To accomplish our goals, the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health will leverage the research strengths and experience of our three existing schools as well as previous investments by UT Southwestern in public health research and interventions. The latter is exemplified by the long-standing Dallas Heart Study (now the Dallas Hearts & Mind Study) exploring variation in cardiovascular disease risk among diverse populations and research to improve cancer screening in our large health systems, especially among the underserved. The new school will also benefit from alignment with our growing university health system and extensive network of collaborative partnerships with other health systems, including Parkland Health, Children's Health, Texas Health Resources, and the Dallas Veterans Affairs Medical Center, as well as other institutions.

The initial faculty of the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health will comprise members of the Department of Population and Data Sciences of the School of Medicine, as well as members of several

other departments from all of our schools. The faculty will be substantially expanded by recruitment of leading senior and early career public health scholars from across the country and beyond, supported by funds from the O'Donnell Foundation as well as institutional resources and additional philanthropic gifts.

Cross-cutting programs of the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health will be anchored on existing institutional strengths. These include data science, epidemiology, implementation science, and health system/population health research. These programs will address some of society's most challenging problems that impact communities in North Texas and worldwide. Areas of concentrations within these programs will include a focus on the burden of chronic diseases (such as diabetes, Alzheimer's, obesity, and heart disease), disease prevention, socioeconomic determinants of health and disparities in health outcomes and health equity, global health and emerging infections, and environmental change impact on health. The Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health will advance the well-being of communities by translating scientific discoveries into public health solutions and assuring the capacity to respond to future public health emergencies.

I am grateful to the O'Donnell Foundation under the leadership of William T. Solomon, President and CEO, for continuing Peter and Edith O'Donnell's legacy of extraordinary support to UT Southwestern. I also extend my thanks to the Texas State Legislature for the \$10 million in startup funds it committed in last year's regular legislative session. My sincere appreciation also goes to Vice President Amanda Billings and her team in the Office of Development and Alumni Relations for their roles in helping to secure this transformative gift. And finally, I would like to thank Interim Dean [Celette Sugg Skinner, Ph.D.](#), Professor and Chair of the Department of Population and Data Sciences, the executive steering committee, and all of those who are working to ensure the new school is ready for our first incoming class of master's students in the fall of 2023 and doctoral students the following year.

The science of public health seeks to improve the quality of life for whole communities. A better understanding of the barriers to health provides promise for equitable and accessible care for all in North Texas, one of the most populous and diverse regions of the country. And that goal resonates with the core mission of UT Southwestern – promoting health and a healthy society that enables individuals to achieve their full potential. Please join me in celebrating today's news and the unprecedented potential made possible by the O'Donnell Foundation gift.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.  
President  
UT Southwestern Medical Center