

Reflecting on a year of progress at UTSW

May 27, 2026

To the UT Southwestern Community:

Now that Memorial Day is behind us and we are approaching the end of the 2025-26 academic year, I want to express my appreciation for your efforts, which have enabled us to accomplish so much this year. Together, we are training the next generation, advancing discovery, and improving lives through exceptional care.

I am writing today to provide an overview of some of our recent progress, recognizing that even this lengthy email reflects just a fraction of your collective impact. I've organized the message into sections for easier reading.

Our People

This year, a number of new leaders have assumed important roles for our institution. Following a national search, **Stephen Kimatian, M.D.**, was appointed **Chair of the Department of Anesthesiology & Pain Management**, while this past October, **Traci d'Auguste, M.B.A., M.S.H.A.**, joined UT Southwestern as **Chief Executive Officer of William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital**.

Additional new leaders will be arriving this summer. Beginning in July, **Warren D. D'Souza, Ph.D., M.B.A.**, will serve as our inaugural **Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer**, bringing extensive experience in AI, data science, and digital health innovation. **Wayne Young, M.B.A., M.Ed.**, will join us in August to lead the Texas Behavioral Health Center as its **Vice President and CEO** and will also serve as **Vice President of Behavioral Health Integration and Partnerships at UTSW**, as we work in close partnership with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to expand behavioral health services for the communities of North Texas. With the retirement of **Holly Crawford, M.B.A.**, as **Executive Vice President for Business Affairs** after five years of dedicated service, and as the search for a permanent successor continues, I am grateful that **Marc Nivet, Ed.D., M.B.A.**, has agreed to serve in this role on an interim basis in addition to his ongoing responsibilities as EVP for Institutional Advancement. Nationwide searches are actively underway for Department Chairs in Biophysics, Internal Medicine, Neuroscience, Surgery, and the Lyda Hill Department of Bioinformatics.

We have also taken steps to enhance the experience of all those who work and study at UTSW by launching the **Office of Campus Life**, a priority in the most recent update to the Six-Year Strategic Plan. It will be led by **Courtney Crothers**, who currently serves as curator of art across our campus, and reflects the priority we place on fostering engagement, well-being, and connection. In that same spirit, in the coming weeks, we will again celebrate colleagues who exemplify our core values of excellence, innovation, teamwork, and compassion at

the **Employee Recognition Program** events June 9-10 and the **UTSW Pinnacle Awards** on **Wednesday, June 17**, at 4 p.m. I encourage each of you to attend the Pinnacle Awards, which recognize outstanding contributions by UTSW staff who strengthen the sense of community that helps us do our best work.

As an especially important undertaking, we recently completed our annual **Values in Practice employee engagement survey**. Thank you for sharing your perspectives and contributing to our high participation rate. We plan to share the survey results in the coming weeks. The insights provided will form the basis for actions intended to enhance the UTSW workplace experience.

Education and Training

This year's commencement ceremonies – in May for the Schools of Medicine, Public Health, and Biomedical Sciences, and in December for the School of Health Professions – marked an important milestone for our students and trainees as they advanced to the next stage of their professional journeys.

At the same time, our educational efforts continue to be recognized at the state and national levels. The 2026 *U.S. News & World Report* Best Graduate Schools list ranked UTSW's **Medical School** as Tier 1 for Research and Tier 2 for Primary Care. Our **Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences** is ranked No. 16 in Biological Sciences, and the Master of Physician Assistant Studies Program within the **School of Health Professions** is ranked No. 8 in the nation. I note that the School of Health Professions graduated its first cohort of **genetic counseling students** on May 8. They will be recognized in December's commencement ceremony.

This spring, UT Southwestern completed the **Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) site visit** required for the Medical School's reaccreditation, marking the culmination of years of preparation and collaboration across the institution. Led by **Sherry C. Huang, M.D.**, Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Education, and the educational team, the effort included submission of a comprehensive 600-page report, three mock site visits, and broad participation from faculty, staff, students, and leadership who helped demonstrate the strength of UT Southwestern's educational mission and learning environment. We look forward to receiving the final results and accreditation decision in the fall.

The excellence of our educational programs is a direct reflection of our dedicated educators. This year, faculty across the institution were recognized by the Southwestern Academy of Teachers for their commitment to teaching and mentorship. In addition, we installed a new wall display honoring UT Southwestern's most outstanding educators. This tribute, located on the first floor of the D Building on South Campus, was unveiled during the annual **Celebrating Excellence in Education** ceremony in March to recognize their dedication and impact. I encourage everyone to find time to view it.

We are making further investments in our educational mission. Under the leadership of **W. P. Andrew Lee, M.D.**, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost, and Dean of the Medical School, planning is underway for a **new academic building**. It will be built, subject to ultimate approval by our Board of Regents, on South Campus and will support the continued growth of the **O'Donnell School of Public Health**, as well as provide a replacement for the existing building for the **School of Health Professions**, fostering greater interdisciplinary collaboration.

Research and Discovery

Our discovery enterprise operates on a remarkable scale with profound global impact. With more than 500 laboratories and thousands of active research initiatives, our faculty-led teams are advancing knowledge across the full spectrum of human health and unmet medical needs – work that is grounded in our commitment to fundamental discovery. Despite challenges across the biomedical enterprise – including uncertainties about federal research funding – our research community has continued to make meaningful progress.

This academic year, several faculty members earned notable recognition for exemplifying the excellence of the research conducted at UT Southwestern. Among them:

- Three UTSW faculty members were elected to the **National Academy of Sciences**, one of the highest honors bestowed upon scientists in the U.S. for outstanding contributions to biomedical science: **Elizabeth Chen, Ph.D.**, Professor of Molecular Biology and Cell Biology; **Ralph DeBerardinis, M.D., Ph.D.**, Director of the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development, Director of the Genetic and Metabolic Disease Program in Children's Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern (CRI), and Professor of Pediatrics; and **Joel Elmquist, D.V.M., Ph.D.**, Professor of Internal Medicine, Pharmacology, and Psychiatry and Director of the Center for Hypothalamic Research. UT Southwestern now has 27 NAS members, more than all other health-related institutions in Texas combined. We also have 25 members of the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) among our faculty, including **Joshua Mendell, M.D., Ph.D.**, and **Duoja Pan, Ph.D.**, who were elected this past fall.
- **Steven McKnight, Ph.D.**, Professor of Biochemistry, was awarded the **Albert Lasker Basic Medical Research Award**, widely considered the nation's preeminent honor for biomedical science, for his discoveries that have revealed the role of proteins of low sequence complexity and their influence on myriad biological processes.
- **Zhijian "James" Chen, Ph.D.**, Professor of Molecular Biology and a renowned expert on the immune system's defense against bacteria and viruses, received the **2026 Japan Prize in Life Sciences**, one of the most prestigious international awards in science and technology.
- **Yunsun Nam, Ph.D.**, Professor of Biochemistry and Biophysics, received the **2026 Edith and Peter O'Donnell Award in Biological Sciences** from the Texas Academy of Medicine, Engineering, Science & Technology (TAMEST) for her foundational work on RNA-protein interactions.
- **Eric Olson, Ph.D.**, founding Chair and Professor of Molecular Biology at UTSW, was presented with the **2025 Louisa Gross Horwitz Prize** by Columbia University – one of our country's most distinguished awards – for his groundbreaking work on the genetic control of muscle development and disease and the advancement of novel treatments for Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD), a debilitating and fatal disease of skeletal muscle and the heart.

- **Kim Orth, Ph.D.**, Professor of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry, was elected to the **American Academy of Arts and Sciences**. Her induction, celebrating her international renown for uncovering how bacterial pathogens manipulate host cells, brings the number of Academy members at UTSW to 12.

On July 1, we will welcome another NAS and NAM member to our faculty. **Jean-Laurent Casanova, M.D., Ph.D.**, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator and internationally recognized expert in genetics, immunology, and infectious diseases, will serve as a Professor in the Center for the Genetics of Host Defense and Children's Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern, with dual appointments in Pediatrics and Immunology.

Also effective July 1, **Benjamin Levi, M.D.**, Professor of Surgery, will serve as Director of the **Charles and Jane Pak Center for Mineral Metabolism and Clinical Research**, which advances research and clinical care related to bone and mineral disorders. He will continue to serve concurrently as Chief of UT Southwestern's Division of Burn, Trauma, Acute and Critical Care Surgery.

This year, we have laid the foundation for several initiatives that will shape the future of discovery and care. The launch of **SPARC** (Sequencing Populations to Accelerate Research and Care), under the leadership of Dr. DeBerardinis and **Eric Peterson, M.D., M.P.H.**, Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Research, builds on our institution's legacy of translational research. By combining genomic sequencing with clinical data, SPARC will create one of the nation's largest biobanks, aiming to enroll more than 150,000 participants to accelerate precision medicine and population health.

Separately, we recently formalized the establishment of the **Will and Liza Lee Center for Liver Disease and Transplant Research**, named in honor of William Lee, M.D., a long-serving member of our faculty and now Professor Emeritus at UTSW, who dedicated his career to the study and treatment of liver disease, and his wife, Liza Lee, a distinguished educator in Dallas. **Amit Singal, M.D., M.S.**, Professor of Internal Medicine, Medical Director of the Liver Tumor Program, and Chief of Hepatology, serves as the Center's inaugural Director.

UT Southwestern was also selected for two significant research programs. The Liver Tumor Program in the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center was designated by the National Cancer Institute as a **Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE)** – UTSW's third SPORE. The five-year, \$12 million grant aims to speed the development of new ways to treat and prevent liver cancer. And the National Institute on Aging funded the **North Texas Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC)**, based at UTSW, which will investigate the basic mechanisms underlying Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, including clinical interventions for diagnosis, monitoring, and treatment.

The **O'Donnell Brain Institute (OBI)** recently marked its **10th anniversary**. With more than 300,000 patients treated annually and expansive programs in brain-related science, OBI is committed to excellence in patient care and discovery. Under the leadership of Director **William T. Dauer, M.D.**, the OBI has over the past year attracted top researchers, including **Attila Losonczy, M.D., Ph.D.**, a pioneer in cellular and circuit neuroscience, who leads our new Program in Memory Longevity, and **Pedro Rosa Neto, M.D., Ph.D.**, who now serves as Director and Principal Investigator of the ADRC, both recruited to UT Southwestern as Dear Scholars in Neurosciences. On the clinical front, a multidisciplinary team led by **Nader Pouratian, M.D., Ph.D.**, Chair of Neurological Surgery, and **Peter Tsai, M.D., Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Neurology, is developing neuromodulation therapies for patients with cerebellar

disorders of the brain, using advanced mapping techniques to better define the best targets for brain stimulation. Additionally, the landmark Dallas Heart Study celebrated 25 years, having expanded its scope in its most recent phase, the **Dallas Hearts and Minds Study**. **Amil Shah, M.D.**, Professor of Internal Medicine in the Division of Cardiology, was recruited to UTSW from Harvard Medical School in 2023 to take over as the study's Director.

Our **Innovation Hub**, launched last May under the leadership of **Daniel Hommes, M.D., Ph.D.**, Vice President and Chief Innovation Officer, is intended to facilitate the translation of discoveries into real-world applications so that breakthroughs developed at UT Southwestern can reach patients and communities. More than 80 potential pipeline projects have been identified over the course of its first year, including novel drugs to treat cancer and neurodegenerative diseases; AI-powered solutions to help doctors prescribe the right antibiotic or clear overcrowding in the emergency department; and new technologies to improve brain imaging and cancer surgery. Dr. Hommes and his team recently unveiled the Hub's [Discovery Information Management System](#) (DIMS), a platform built to foster campus collaborations, steward progress in the development of innovative technologies, and provide greater visibility to potential external stakeholders and investors.

Advancing Clinical Excellence

We are deeply grateful to the patients and families who give us the privilege of their trust in seeking medical care at UTSW. Across our clinical enterprise, we saw strong growth and sustained quality. For the ninth year in a row, UTSW remained the **No. 1 hospital in the Dallas-Fort Worth** region in *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, with more nationally ranked specialties (12) than any other hospital in the state, reflecting measured quality, safety, and experience of care delivered to our patients. Our teams have achieved meaningful improvements in outcomes, including sustained reductions in mortality, helping place UT Southwestern among the nation's top academic medical centers in patient experience. Regardless of these overall achievements, we must never lose sight of the fact that for each patient, we are only as good as the care and experience we deliver to them individually.

Among notable recent milestones, UT Southwestern's **nursing team earned Magnet Recognition with Distinction**, a top-tier honor from the American Nurses Credentialing Center reserved for the very small percentage of organizations that exceed key performance benchmarks. It marks UTSW's third straight Magnet designation for excellence in nursing.

Our **Solid Organ Transplant Program** recently completed its 1,000th heart and 2,000th kidney transplants, making UT Southwestern one of only 15 transplant programs in the U.S. to have performed more than 1,000 transplants in each of four solid organs: heart, lung, kidney, and liver.

We are making significant investments to meet the evolving healthcare needs of our region. Construction is now underway on our **Radiation Oncology facility** in Fort Worth, which will offer the most advanced therapies to patients in the nation's 10th-largest city, including technologies not currently available in Tarrant County. Projected to open in early 2028, the new facility – the largest of its kind in the county – will be connected to UT Southwestern's Moncrief Cancer Institute in Fort Worth's Medical District.

We are preparing to launch a new **Center for Prostate Cancer Care** later this fall, an important initiative that will streamline and coordinate care for patients with prostate cancer by bringing together our leading experts to significantly reduce the time between testing,

diagnosis, and treatment. Through this multidisciplinary approach, patients will have access to advanced diagnostic technologies, dedicated patient navigators, and an integrated team of specialists focused on delivering the highest level of personalized care. To support this initiative, construction will soon be underway on a new prostate cancer care clinic in West Campus Building 3, along with a satellite location at our RedBird regional medical center in Southwest Dallas County.

The **Texas Behavioral Health Center**, Dallas-Fort Worth's first state-funded psychiatric hospital, will begin its phased opening next month. When fully operational, it will ultimately provide nearly 300 beds to support adult and pediatric patients. We can all take enormous pride in the role that UTSW has played in planning, designing, and overseeing construction of this much-needed facility to serve those suffering from serious psychiatric illnesses, and we are privileged to have been selected to operate it on behalf of HHSC. The Center will provide comprehensive behavioral health treatment, new care models, and training across all behavioral health disciplines. This has involved support from virtually every one of our institutional functions and has been possible only because of the remarkable dedication of scores of UTSW faculty and staff. I note in particular the outstanding contributions of **Hicham Ibrahim, M.D., M.B.A.**, Interim CEO and Vice President and Senior Executive Officer for Ambulatory Services; the deeply missed **Becky McCulley, M.S.N., RN**, Vice President for Clinical Programming and Facility Development, who sadly passed away this spring; **Tarek Rajji, M.D.**, Chair of Psychiatry; and **Juan M. Guerra Jr., M.B.A.**, Vice President for Facilities Management – all under the overall leadership of **Jonathan Efron, M.D.**, EVP for Health System Affairs.

Concurrently, construction is progressing on our **New Pediatric Campus** in partnership with Children's Health – one of the most significant projects in our history. Over the past year, we have been fortunate to receive additional philanthropic support from the community, including our fourth \$100 million gift. I hope each of you shares my excitement in seeing the progress being made at the site across from Clements University Hospital and all that it promises for advancing our commitment to exceptional pediatric care, as well as our research and training missions. We look forward to a "topping out" ceremony in early fall.

Looking Ahead

Our continued growth – never simply for growth's sake – brings new opportunities but also challenges. We must remain committed to improving how we deliver on our mission, enhancing access, efficiency, and the experience we provide for our patients, learners, and one another. By investing in our people, strengthening our mission, and embracing innovation, UT Southwestern is well positioned to build on this momentum and further extend its impact.

Our ability to fulfill our mission depends on the trust of our patients, learners, policymakers, the public, and our own community in the integrity of all we do. In that spirit, over the past year we convened a Commission to conduct a **comprehensive review of our conflict of interest policies**. I am grateful to Dr. Peterson and **Joan Conaway, Ph.D.**, Vice Provost and Dean of Basic Research, for co-leading this initiative and engaging the many faculty and staff members who contributed throughout this monthslong effort. I just recently received the group's recommendations, which address areas including research, vendor relationships, and outside activities, and I look forward to sharing plans to formalize and implement the proposed changes.

I want to conclude by again underscoring my conviction that your dedication is the basis of our continued success. At a time when many are navigating uncertainty, change, and division in the world around us, our community has remained cohesive and steadfast in its commitment to our mission. As we close this academic year, I look forward to all we will accomplish together in the next one, including welcoming the Class of 2030 in August. I plan to write again at the start of the new academic year to share our priorities and the important work ahead. In the meantime, I hope you are able to take some time off this summer to relax, recharge, and enjoy time with family and friends.

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