

Sept. 3, 2025, Briefing Transcript

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Good morning. I'm Dr. Daniel Podolsky, President of UT Southwestern Medical Center, and I want to welcome all of you who are joining me this morning for this first quarterly briefing in the new academic year. And a special welcome to those who are new to the campus and the institution since the last of these quarterly briefings, that includes our students at all four of our schools, many new colleagues who have joined our staff, and members of our faculty. If you haven't seen it, I hope you'll take a moment to look for the message I sent the campus on Monday. It'll be in your inbox with a subject line "Welcoming a New Academic Year at UT Southwestern." In it, I highlight some of the developments on the campus over the summer as well as highlight the priorities for the coming year. And given that that message just went out on Monday, I'm going to not repeat all the details in this briefing but focus on the latest news to leave as much (time as) possible for questions – I understand we've received quite a number for this briefing.

So let me begin where I do with each of these updates, and that is to touch on the people because that is the essence of UT Southwestern. Again, that message that went out on Monday makes note of several new leaders on the campus who've assumed important responsibilities on behalf of our institution, and I do hope you'll take time to take note of those yourselves and for the opportunity to meet some of our new colleagues as well. I do want to speak to one of the searches that is ongoing that I know has caused interest and some curiosity on the campus, and that is the search for our inaugural Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer. I don't think anybody can doubt that artificial intelligence has at least the possibility of transforming really what we do across all aspects of our mission and how we operate as an institution.

Indeed, we had a workgroup led last year by Vice Provosts Joan Conaway and Eric Peterson, which helped crystallize some of the ways in which AI can be used to advance our clinical care, our educational programs, and our research teams as well. In addition, the possibility to streamline and make more efficient and effective many of our business operations. This new leadership position will come with the responsibility to coordinate all of our efforts to identify the opportunities for a positive impact of AI, and at the same time, be sure that we're deploying AI in ways which are responsible and ethical, and to identify what we need to do as an institution to invest in these new possibilities. I look forward sharing with you a successful outcome from that search, which is now underway, along with ongoing searches for several of our academic department chairs. Now, with that, I'd like to turn to a topic that some, but I know not all are aware of, and that is our obligation to comply with a new aspect of the Americans with Disabilities Acts, which requires a digital accessibility under Title II of that legislation.

We're required to comply with this by April 26 of the next year. And while that may seem like a long way off, we now realize this is going to take considerable effort by many across the campus, and that work is now underway, being spearheaded by Holly Crawford, our Executive Vice President for Business Affairs. Digital accessibility is essential to ensure that individuals with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with all of our digital platforms. For example, all of our website, but also all of our

electronic communications, say in our Health System, through MyChart and other channels. Enhancements we will be making include features compatible with assistive technologies, inclusion of captions, and transcriptions for recordings and designs with clear hierarchy and presentation. And I guess that would include these briefings as well. Creating an inclusive digital experience is a shared responsibility, and I really ask for all who need to be involved in that to lend your efforts so that we can not only comply as a legal obligation, but really, so that we are able to serve those who this is meant to assist.

From accessibility, I'd like to turn to sustainability and our recent sustainability initiatives. These are emphasizing a reduction on our environmental impact, enhancing our energy efficiency, and promoting resource conservation across all of our facilities. Highlights currently include major upgrades such as eco-friendly refrigeration systems, automated humidification, and energy-efficient chillers, along with innovative efforts like repurposing equipment, a digital building efficiency project at Clements University Hospital, and eliminating Styrofoam in food services. I know that there are many on the campus who have been concerned to know whether we are doing our fair share in preserving sustainability, which on the flip side also helps our resilience and our readiness to face challenges such as we seem to experience almost annually now, whether it's with one weather event or another. And so I will continue to update you on the progress being made. I give a special appreciation to Juan Guerra, our VP for Facilities Management, who's spearheading much of these efforts here.

I'm very pleased to [inaudible 00:06:15] to another topic to note that we're in a season in which UT Southwestern as an institution and many of our individual leaders and colleagues are being recognized for their great contributions. I hope all of you have seen over the course of the summer that in the latest rankings from *U.S. News & World Report*, which were released several weeks ago, UT Southwestern for the ninth year in a row was identified as the No. 1 hospital in Dallas-Fort Worth, and indeed had the highest number of ranked specialties of any hospital in Texas. Indeed, seven of our specialty areas were in the top 20 in the country – now understand that that's out of 4,500 hospitals – and 11 specialties were in the top 30. In addition to the specialties, UT Southwestern was highlighted for having high performance in 17 adult procedures and conditions. This is a testament to the dedication that everybody working in our Health System and those who support those efforts and the impact that we're having on our patients in the quality of care, both in outcomes and in the experience of care. And I thank everybody who's been involved.

And I'll also note some coming recognition. Again, I ask you to keep an eye on your inbox for this week when we will announce the recipients of the Leaders in Clinical Excellence Awards for 2025. I want to give a special thanks to the members of the review committee led by Drs. Maeve Sheehan and John Mansour for undertaking the difficult challenge of evaluating the more than 200 nominees that were put forward by their colleagues to identify those who will be the recipients of these very special recognitions here on the campus this year. Again, we'll be announcing those in the next couple of days, and we'll celebrate those recipients and the work that they do for our patients in Gooch Auditorium on Nov. 5. And I can say, but without being more specific, we'll have more good news to share in the recognition of the contributions of our colleagues, I know, in the next few weeks.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Turning to another topic in a way that connects back to those recognitions, in the general theme of the central importance of the commitment, as I've already referenced, of everybody who comes to UT Southwestern, to ultimately what we can achieve as an institution. And I can assure you that what is essential to the successes that we've enjoyed has been the engagement of everybody across our workforce.

Now, those of you who are not new to the campus will know that every year about this time, we carry out an engagement survey. Historically, and for many years, that was the Values in Practice, or VIP survey. But in this last year, we kind of bifurcated that, continuing the VIP survey for those working outside of our clinical areas and a new instrument going by the acronym SCORE, for those working within the clinical care environment, for its specific adaptation for working in a health delivery environment.

As I said, we would normally, about this time, be preparing for an annual repeat to see where we are on acting on what we learned from last year's engagement survey. And in fact, last year the surveys were very forthcoming with insights into ways in which you told us we can make UT Southwestern an even better place to work and for people to really be fulfilled in their work. And with all of the efforts that has served to stimulate, we felt that we needed the time to be sure that those were fully executed and we had the chance to see the implementation. And it is for that reason that we will defer having a VIP or a SCORE survey this year and look forward to the full impact of unrolling all of the plans that, as I've already said, were launched on the basis of the surveys from last year.

Now, with that, I will turn to some other coming attractions, but maybe before I do, to make note of the continuing progress being made on some of our long-standing projects. It was just about a year ago, not quite, that we officially broke ground for the new pediatric campus. And anybody who has been by the north end of the campus can see the progress that's been made. Most of that has been an excavation to this point, as we prepare the site for the underground parking, which will serve the needs of the entire New Pediatric Campus, but especially the hospital itself. But with the expectation that excavation will be fully complete within the coming few months. And then, we'll proceed on with the construction in the form of actually building the structures.

Another sign of progress, in the last week or two, we've seen the fourth tower crane of what ultimately will be nine tower cranes necessary to construct that project. And I think you can take that as just one more benchmark of the scale of the undertaking of this partnership with Children's Health to be sure we are ready to address the needs for pediatric patients in this growing region of the state through the kind of facility which will allow our physicians, other providers, and everybody else working there to do their very best to serve the needs of those children and their families.

We're also now making progress in Fort Worth, a Radiation Oncology facility, in the early stages, moving utilities to enable the construction of the facility to directly to begin within the next month or so. That is part of our commitment to expanding our access to UT Southwestern care for the communities of Fort Worth and the surrounding parts of Tarrant County, and most especially in the area of access to the really cutting-edge cancer treatments that patients are coming to UT Southwestern (for) and many of them from that part of the Metroplex. I would ask you to keep your eye on the inbox for still one more

reason, and that will be sharing some plans for further expanding our footprint there in Fort Worth in service to that goal of providing access to UT Southwestern care close to home.

Now, moving to some coming attractions. One is imminent, in this season in which we participate in the state employee charitable campaign, the SECC. It's an opportunity for us to come together as a community to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those less fortunate throughout Texas. And we are participating, along with every other state agency, with the ability to direct a contribution to one of more than 1,000 potential worthy organizations that best align with your interests and your priorities.

The campaign's a testament to the power of collective giving, and we have a collective goal, as a campus, of \$300,000 this year. I hope you'll join me in participating to get to that goal. And if you are interested in finding more about it, please turn to our website or send questions to secc-campaign@utsouthwestern.edu.

We're just a week away now from the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from Sept. 15 through Oct. 15. We will be celebrating that, as we have in the past year, with a fiesta on the Plaza, that is the McDermott Plaza here on South Campus on October 8, and it will feature Hispanic foods and cultural performance.

And next week, UT Southwestern will host the 2025 Beth Levine, M.D. Prize in Autophagy Research. This award was established in 2023 and is presented biannually to honor the legacy of the late Beth Levine, a colleague of ours who did pioneering work that laid the foundation for the field of autophagy for all of its importance to many areas of medicine. The ceremony will take place on Sept. 15 at 11 a.m. to noon, with lunch following. The recipient this year is Dr. Andrea Ballabio, an internationally-recognized investigator from Italy who has devoted his career to explaining the mechanisms underlying genetic diseases.

The last week of this month marks APP Celebration Week, and I hope you'll join us in recognizing our nearly 1,000 advanced practice providers who work collaboratively with our physicians and others to ensure that patients have timely access to the highest-quality, evidence-based care.

And I also note that coming a little further out, on Oct. 16, the last of this calendar year's President's Lectures, and we will be featuring Dr. Saad Omer, founding Dean of our Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health. Dr. Omer is recognized worldwide as an epidemiologist who has really employed evidence-based approaches to tackling community health problems. And also, a world-recognized authority in vaccines and how they can impact public health.

And finally, I note before turning to your questions that we're also coming up to the season of the Dallas Heart Walk, which will take place this year on Oct. 18. However, instead of convening at Reunion Tower in Dallas, as we have in past years, it will take place at the Levy Event Plaza in Irving. So, stay on the lookout for more information in the coming weeks. It's a wonderful, fun event. I hope you'll join me there. And I hope, once again, UT Southwestern will be out in force, as it is commonly the best represented organization that participates in the walk in advancing the interest of combating heart disease.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

So with that, I will turn to Jenny Doren, our Vice President for Communications, who's here to pose your questions to me.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Well, thank you so much, Dr. Podolsky. It's good to be back. I know we often discuss parking, but we truly received a record number of questions on the topic, so I'm going to do my best to cover some key themes, beginning with the need for more parking. Will more spots become available?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, before answering the question directly, I do want to acknowledge that this is a challenge for many, those who may be coming into a late shift or arriving mid-shift. And in terms of us needing to really be flexible in moving around our own construction projects so that we're using overflow lots. And I appreciate those whose forbearance, who find themselves needing that. But to answer the question directly, we do have a number of initiatives aimed at addressing the shortfall that people do experience, particularly depending on where and when they may be parking. We are preparing to break ground on a new 500-plus space lot at Forest Park and Bomar Avenue with completion expected by March.

Obviously, this will most effectively serve the needs of North Campus, being on the backside of that part of the campus, and will also be flexible overflow for the campus more broadly. And at Clements University Hospital, we've completed demolition of the Life Care building and are constructing a new 300-plus space lot to meet growing demand there. These, I think, are meaningful additions, even if I will acknowledge they're not ultimately going to be sufficient immediately for the needs of the campus. Well, I wish there were a more immediate solution. I want to stress that we're exploring all options to expand parking and we'll keep you informed of our progress. This remains a priority.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

OK, very good. Another repeat parking question centered on cost. Why does the parking rate go up if more spaces, I know you mentioned shortfall right now, are not available?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, we do evaluate the parking fees annually, and they're basically set to recover the cost of just maintaining the garage. So, just to dispel the notion, should anyone have it that the parking is run as a service to generate revenue, it really is meant simply to support the parking facilities themselves. And this year, the repairs for our collective garages totaled more than \$3 million, and that does not include the significantly higher costs of building the two new lots that I just mentioned, which will bring an additional 800 new spaces to campus. With that in mind, a modest increase has been implemented to help cover rising maintenance costs and new lot construction. For staff with lot parking, that will amount to 33 cents per month and for the staff with garage parking, 92 cents a month. Now I understand any additional expense is an additional challenge, however big or small it might be, especially at a time when I realize personal budgets are tight, and any increase can be frustrating. Again,

please be assured, we're working diligently to implement meaningful improvements as soon as we possibly can.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

A final parking question centers on lighting and safety. What steps are being taken to prioritize improvements in these areas?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, I certainly appreciate the question. Lighting and safety are key to how we support our campus community, and I'd like to briefly share what's in place and where we're continuing to improve. Over the past five years, we've upgraded all UT Southwestern garage lighting to energy-efficient LED fixtures. Facilities management conducts inspections of every garage light three times a week and has electricians on campus twice a week to complete necessary repairs. If a larger electrical issue is identified, emergency services are brought in to restore lighting as quickly as possible, and our University Police also, in patrolling the garage, report lighting issues during that inspection, helping to ensure timely repairs.

In partnership with the Office of Safety and Business Continuity, we conduct lighting studies to ensure parking structures meet accepted safety standards. I do encourage anyone who notices an area with insufficient lighting to contact either the University Police or the Office of Safety and Business Continuity. And of course, lighting is just one part of the broader safety picture. Here are a few additional measures in place to help ensure our campus remains secure. First, our University Police regularly patrol lots and garages. Second, emergency call boxes are tested monthly to ensure they're fully operational. Third, security escorts are available 24/7 upon request. And finally, the Safety Connection Mobile app offers virtual escorts, a personal panic alarm, and a way to report safety concerns. Instructions are available on the University Police intranet site.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

So from parking to government affairs, are there any direct or indirect financial impacts of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act on our institution? For those who may be unfamiliar, this legislation, it was signed into law on July 4, includes sweeping changes to federal taxes, credits, and deductions. How might that influence our strategic priorities in operations?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, the full impact is still unfolding, but we can say that the One Big Beautiful Bill Act does have the possibility to affect future UT Southwestern clinical operations through changes in the Medicaid reimbursement programs. And I say that not only thinking about the patients that we take care of in our own facilities, but of course the impact it can have on our partners, Parkland and Children's. Texas's current Medicaid payment programs have been preserved, but the state is actively negotiating new state-directed payment models with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. That is, the feds. And these negotiations could result in changes to how care is reimbursed in the future. We know that the law is intended to affect more than \$800 billion in cuts over the next 10 years. What we can say is

the effects will not be immediate, and we are closely monitoring the developments and working with the UT System and our state partners to understand and prepare for potential impacts.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Thank you for that explanation. Another frequently asked question is with regards to kids being back in school, fall on the horizon, many of our colleagues are curious about the availability of an annual flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster. I know there's a lot of news on this topic too. Will we be offering those as we have done so in the past?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, the question is, of course, timely and an important one, and I will note that in the frequently referenced inbox in this briefing, I come back to it once more to point out that if you look there, you will find a communication for Occupational Health that went out yesterday outlining the plans for our flu vaccination campaign, which will begin Sept. 15 and continue through the end of October. And so I will refer you to that communication for the details of how to register. But to remind you, as has been long-standing policy here at UT Southwestern, going back years before we heard of COVID, it is a requirement for anybody who is in a clinical environment to either receive a flu vaccination or if electing not to, or with a contraindication, to require a mask during the flu season to, of course, keep our caregiving environments safe for our patients and for our colleagues. While not a requirement, I would certainly encourage everybody in the campus to take advantage of access here on the campus, or of course out in the community, as available, a flu vaccine.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

We do also intend to provide the COVID-19 vaccine, but final plans for that are pending further clarification from the federal government about permissible uses for those vaccines. I think many, if not certainly most, joining me this morning will know that at the end of August, the FDA approved and updated a monovalent COVID-19 (vaccine), based on the JN.1 lineage for the fall, but with access limited to adults over 65 or those younger with any one of a number of underlying health conditions.

Please look for further communications as we finalize the plans for that to understand how they will impact our deployment for those who are eligible. At any rate, to come back to it again, scheduling for flu vaccine appointments began yesterday, and vaccinations can be scheduled to start on Monday, Sept. 15. I do note, just to come back for just a moment to COVID-19, as was reported in the paper this morning, and as we are seeing in our own hospital, there is a definite uptick in COVID, dominated by the newest variant of Omicron called the Stratus with the remainder, largely a former variant or an earlier variant, Nimbus.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

I think we have time for two more questions and we'll certainly reach back out to those who submitted questions that we did not have a chance to get to this morning. This is a topic that is deeply personal for many, and that's leave policies and how we support colleagues during major life events. While paid leave is offered for new parents through birth or adoption, many employees are also caring for aging

parents. Is there a way to explore a paid leave option beyond FMLA that could support employees during these times as well?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

I do appreciate that many of the UT Southwestern community do have challenges in also supporting their families through illness and other challenges, and I do truly value the feedback on benefits and understand how important it is for everyone to balance work and family responsibility, including caring for elder parents or others. Our policy, EMP 256 Family and Medical Leave, is designed to support employees through a variety of life circumstances. Extended recovery from surgery, caring for a parent with a health condition, and more.

This resource provides eligible employees up to 12 work weeks of unpaid job protected leave for specified family and medical reasons within a 12-month period. Employees can utilize any available and applicable paid time off, whether that's prior sick time, any accumulated balance, in combination with FMLA. While we do not currently have a specific paid benefit within what was financially supportable for the whole campus, specifically in place for eldercare, our HR team continually reviews and explores opportunities to enhance our benefits package to better support our employees, and we'll assure you that we'll make this topic a part of the conversation when we look to the next fiscal year in designing our benefits. But to remind those, or to make those who might not be aware, much of our benefits package is ultimately determined at the UT System level and not within the direct control of UT Southwestern as an individual institution.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Thank you for that clarification. I think we'll end perhaps where we began. You spent some time during your opening remarks talking about AI, and I'm sure you would understand that there's great interest, perhaps some hesitancy around artificial intelligence. Can you address any available training for faculty and staff and how we can use AI to improve our efficiency and effectiveness at work? I know one writer actually suggested a panel discussion on how some members of our campus community are using AI, as one suggestion.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, as mentioned early in my update, we are excited to recruit a leader whose very title, Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer, underscores our institutional commitment to utilizing AI in meaningful and ethical ways. I'm also pleased to share that we have a soon-to-be released webpage dedicated to answering questions shared by our campus community. You can expect that page to go live later this month, or perhaps early in the next month, and it will continue to be routinely updated as more resources are added, and as we progress on our AI journey. Training is available and you can email ai@utsouthwestern.edu with individual inquiries. We are building a community of pilot users who are providing feedback in these initial rollout waves.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Thank you so much. And perhaps the theme of the day, watch your inbox for more information on that topic as well.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Thank you, Jenny.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Yeah, thank you so much.