

## Sept. 27, 2023 Briefing Transcript

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Good morning. I'm Dr. Daniel Podolsky, President of UT Southwestern Medical Center, and I welcome all of you who are joining me this morning for this campus update. I note that this is the 67th briefing I've shared with the campus since we began them in April 2020, and now returning after the summer break, we'll plan to continue them on a cadence of a quarterly schedule. Given that this is the first briefing since the beginning of the new academic year, there's a lot to share, but I want to begin by welcoming all of those who are new to our UT Southwestern community, whether you are here to learn, to work, or to train.

Taking note of this new academic year, there was a first for UT Southwestern, at least first in 50 years, in the launch of our new school – the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health. I'm delighted to report the great interest in this new school, with more than 50 students enrolled either in a combined Master of Public Health and medical degree or a Master of Public Health degree on its own in this inaugural year for the school. We look forward to next summer when we'll launch the first doctoral programs for the School of Public Health, and I commend all of the work that is going on to bring us to this important threshold and especially welcome our inaugural Dean, Dr. Saad Omer, who's the helm of our newly established school.

Last month, we also welcomed students to our other three schools on the campus – our Medical School, our Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, and the School of Health Professions. All are a remarkable group of talented and accomplished students who no doubt will add greatly to the UT Southwestern community, and we know, in turn, in the course of time will be contributing to advancing our mission to improve health by virtue of the experience, skills, and knowledge they will gain during their time here at UT Southwestern.

I do have the opportunity to share some important leadership updates. I'm especially pleased to announce, as I did in a campus message a few weeks ago, the appointment of our new Executive Vice President for Health System Affairs. Dr. Jon Efron was selected after a really broad-ranging national search, which surfaced many outstanding candidates. Dr. Efron brings an enormous depth of experience, which will help guide us in the years ahead as we evolve our University Health System and of course the work that we do in caring for patients in our partner institutions. He joins us after more than 17 years as a member of the faculty and leadership at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, where he has held numerous important leadership responsibilities.

Prior to that, Jon was a member of the faculty at the Cleveland Clinic and the Mayo Clinic, and so I think every one of us can appreciate the depth of experience he will bring to UT Southwestern as we navigate our future. He is a highly accomplished colorectal surgeon who specializes in the treatment of colorectal cancer, and I know he is very excited to be joining UT Southwestern, undertaking his new responsibilities Dec. 1. I want to give a special thanks to our Provost and Dean, Dr. Andy Lee, who led the national search and really to all of those who were involved, whether on the search committee or involved in a meeting with our candidates to get to this outstanding outcome.

I'm also delighted to make note that we will welcome Dr. Joseph Merola on Oct. 16 as our new Chair of Dermatology. He joins us after many years of distinguished service at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and is a member of the faculty of the Harvard Medical School, where he has held multiple leadership positions, including Vice Chair of the Department of Dermatology in Clinical Trials and Innovation. In addition to being board certified as a dermatologist, he is also an expert in internal medicine and rheumatology.

The search for the future leaders of our campus continues, and national searches are currently underway for three of our Academic Departments – the Departments of Radiology, Psychiatry, and Orthopaedic Surgery – and I certainly look forward to sharing the positive outcomes of those searches at our next briefing.

I'd like to take a moment to make note of a really very special recognition of UT Southwestern. As we conclude September, which is Women in Medicine Month, I am very pleased to share that UT Southwestern has been recognized for its decadeslong commitment to developing women leaders and advancing women's careers. Two groups on campus are being recognized with the 2023 Association of American Medical Colleges, or AAMC, Group on Women in Medicine and Science Leadership Award for an organization. That honor goes to our Women in Science and Medicine Advisory Committee, or WISMAC, and the Office of Women's Careers. Established in 1994, WISMAC formalized efforts to enhance the representation of women faculty and learners and to nurture an inclusive environment to promote their success. The Office of Women's Careers was created in 2012 to further advance professional development and careers of women faculty members. I note that women now make up more than 46% of our UT Southwestern faculty and, thinking back to the new academic year report, that in our incoming Medical School class comprised 56% of our newly enrolled students there.

At this juncture, I am going to assume most, if not everyone, joining me for this briefing will be aware of the most recent rankings released by *U.S. News and World Report* in their Best Hospitals survey, which were shared earlier this summer. In that survey, Clements University Hospital/UT Southwestern was for the first time named to be amongst the Best Hospitals Honor Roll for 2023 and 2024. The Honor Roll comprises the top 20 hospitals from among more than 4,500 hospitals nationally. Our recognition on this elite list means that UT Southwestern is among the nation's highest performing hospitals based on quality of care across 15 specialties and 21 procedures and conditions. And all of this is a reflection of the dedication of our faculty and staff and their commitment to excellence and to providing the very best care possible for our patients, both in outcomes and in experience.

We are, of course, incredibly proud to be tied as the No. 1 ranked hospital in Texas and once again No. 1 in the Dallas-Fort Worth region for the seventh consecutive year. Eleven of our specialties are nationally ranked, that is to say among the top 50 in the country, many among the top 25. As I know is a feeling shared by all of you, our motivation is not to see our name in the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings; rather it is to deliver on that commitment to excellence in care. Nonetheless, insofar as these rankings have been increasingly based on the quality of the care provided, I think we can take pride as an affirmation of that commitment translating into the benefits we want our patients to receive.

I would also make note of another important recognition, and that is for the third year in a row, UT Southwestern is ranked among the nation's best large employers on America's Best Employers 2023 list compiled by *Forbes* and Statista. We are also among this year's top employers for new graduates, for women, and for employee diversity.

These rankings and national recognitions from our peers are a testament to UT Southwestern's impact on the health of our communities, but I'm also incredibly proud that each year we celebrate our exceptional physicians and other caregivers and their teams through our annual Leaders in Clinical Excellence Awards. Earlier this month, you should have received a message from my office announcing

the recipients of our sixth annual Leaders in Clinical Excellence Awards, each winner and program exemplifying our value and the highest standards of care for our patients. I hope you'll join me on Nov. 9 in Gooch Auditorium as we recognize these exceptional colleagues across our many sites of service for the commitment to the care of our patient, to the education and training of the next generation of health care professionals, and to advancing UT Southwestern overall. There are seven award categories, including the Patricia and William L. Watson Jr., M.D. Award for Excellence in Clinical Medicine, our highest honor in clinical care on the campus.

I want to take a moment to thank Drs. Maeve Sheehan and John Mansour, who chaired the selection committee, and all the members of the committee for the hard work in narrowing down such a remarkable group of candidates to the recipients who we'll honor on Nov. 9.

Moving on to recognition for another pillar of what makes UT Southwestern the institution that it is, I'm certainly equally proud and delighted to see the contributions of our research community honored and those responsible for them recognized for their great contribution.

Dr. James Chen, a Professor of Molecular Biology and Director of the Center for Inflammation Research, has been awarded the 2023 Louisa Gross Horwitz Prize in recognition of his groundbreaking work on innate immunity. That is the body's ability to respond to pathogens that quickly identifies and destroys cells that have been impacted by and infected by these agents. This notable distinction of the Horwitz Prize recognizes outstanding contributions in advancing basic research in the fields of biology and biochemistry.

Also I am delighted to share that two of our postdoctoral researchers, [Drs.] Lisandro Maya-Ramos and Alexandra Wells, are among the 25 early-career scientists nationwide selected as Howard Hughes Medical Institute Hanna H. Gray Fellows for 2023. I hope you'll read more about their work in *Center Times Plus*.

Now moving to a topic which I will say, in many ways regrettably, has been with us now for more than three years. I do want to spend a minute to provide an update on COVID and also to comment on the flu vaccination campaign, which is now underway here at UT Southwestern.

The end of August and the early weeks of September did see in North Texas, as has been the case across the country and really in many parts of the world, an upswing in the number of individuals testing positive for COVID-19 and with it, at least a modest increase in the number of patients who have required hospitalization on our own campus. We have seen during that period the number of those we've cared for being admitted for COVID to Clements University Hospital go from really the very low single digits to as high as 20, but now have settled down to about 10 or so on an ongoing basis.

It is certainly a number well below anything we faced when we encountered past surges, but nonetheless reminds us that COVID remains amongst us. It's in that context that I call to your attention the recent FDA approval and endorsement of the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] for COVID boosters. I know this is of interest to many of you, though I also note that the decision to take a booster remains an individual one.

Nonetheless, we certainly want to make access to those booster vaccinations as convenient as may be possible for our employees and our patients accordingly, as you will have seen, I hope, through an announcement that went out yesterday, a communication that there are two options for employees to access the COVID booster here on campus. One may go to any one of our retail pharmacies on just a walk-up basis, or you may schedule a vaccination beginning tomorrow at our Education Center that is on the second floor of Clements University Hospital, which will be open for that purpose for the next week, followed by another week of availability in the POB. Again, I would refer you to the campus

communication for further details of that. But to be clear, this remains at this juncture, and in the absence of an ongoing national health emergency, a decision that really is an individual one.

I do hope that at this point you're already well aware that we are now into our annual flu vaccine campaign, which began on Sept. 18. I know many of you already booked your vaccination appointment via ReadySet and are due to receive your shots through our Solar Lot drive-thru or at Clements University Hospital in the coming days. We are offering both the regular flu vaccine as well as, for employees 65 and older, the high-dose vaccine. By the end of the day today, we anticipate that about 4,000 employees will have already been vaccinated at UT Southwestern, and I note that Occupational Health will remain at CUH this week and next, transitioning to the POB in the week of Oct. 9.

As a reminder, UT Southwestern policy, in contrast to the COVID booster, requires that all faculty, staff, housestaff, and students working or training in our University Hospital and clinics or any UT Southwestern or affiliated clinical research site or location, must receive an influenza vaccination or provide written notice to Occupational Health that they decline for medical, religious, or personal reasons. I encourage you to contact Occupational Health with any questions you may have.

It is the season for the annual State Employee Charitable Campaign [SECC]. I want to thank Drs. Helen Yin and Marc Nivet, who are once again spearheading that effort. I remind you that this is a campaign that provides a means to contribute to a wide range of worthy causes at the discretion of the individual giver. I do know that the funds which are contributed through the SECC each year make a meaningful difference in many organizations and the many constituencies and communities that they serve.

This really stands as a testament to the power of collective giving, where even the smallest contribution can add up to a significant impact. Our campus goal is \$350,000 for this year's campaign, which runs through Oct. 31. I hope you will consider giving within your means and join me in supporting the many worthy causes that this campaign encompasses.

It's also the season for another very important initiative here on campus. We are approaching the time of year when we launch our annual Values in Practice or VIP survey, which serves as one of the most important ways we can gather employee feedback through the year.

This year's survey will open to nonfaculty employees on Oct. 17 and close on Nov. 5. Your confidential feedback helps me and the other leaders of UT Southwestern understand what is working well and where we need to do better to ensure that UT Southwestern is a place where each of us feels engaged, supported, and respected.

To assure you, first of all, the responses that you provide to the survey and the questions and in your comments remain entirely confidential. I also assure you that they really serve as a platform for action. That is to say that we do work with managers on the basis of the responses received from each area to be sure that they have developed plans to address what emerges from those responses that provide guidance in where we can make UT Southwestern a better place for our employees to pursue their work and their commitment to our mission. The survey is intended to take a modest amount of time. We estimate it can be completed in three to five minutes, and I really encourage all of you to participate. The more that we have your feedback, the more that we can stay focused on what's important to you and to our institution. Now I'm going to turn to what is a pretty good list of coming attractions to be sure you are able to get these on the calendar for your own interest. I start by noting that we are midway today through the APP Celebration Week, when we recognize our nearly 1,000 Advanced Practice Providers who work collaboratively with our attending physicians to ensure that patients have timely access to the highest quality of evidence-based care. Approximately 660 of our APPs work with adult patients, and more than 300 serve our pediatric patients.

We are also in the middle of Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from Sept. 15 through Oct. 15, and we will be hosting a Signature Celebration to take place on Oct. 11. I know from experience of attending these each year that it is uniformly a special event for our campus, and I encourage everyone to attend in person or virtually.

This Saturday, please join our “Mammograms Matter” team for the 2023 Komen Greater Fort Worth More Than Pink Walk as we head into Breast Cancer Awareness Month. UT Southwestern’s Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Moncrief Cancer Institute, our vanguard in Fort Worth, are sponsors of the event.

More information was shared in Monday’s *UTSW Insider*, our new [semiweekly] campus newsletter, which I hope you are enjoying reading as much as I do. Also happening this week and really a notable milestone for us, on Sunday, weather permitting planned for 8 a.m., the three towers which comprise the Paul M. Bass Administrative and Clinical Center – and known to those who have lived in Dallas for many years formerly as Exchange Park – will be demolished. This will enable clearance of the site to then proceed with the plans which are in active development for a new pediatric campus to be built in partnership with Children’s Health. This will help position us to meet the growing need for specialty care as our population in North Texas rapidly expands and, along with it, the number of children needing clinical care. I encourage all of you to watch, but to do it online and not in person.

Instructions for online viewing are in the *UTSW Insider*, and there will be livestreaming of the event. So it’s a good, safe, and convenient way for you to be part of this day, which will be part of the history of UT Southwestern as it sets the stage for a whole new chapter in our ability to deliver on the needs of children. Next week, on Oct. 3, we’ll hold the first ever celebration to award UT Southwestern’s inaugural Beth Levine, M.D. Prize in Autophagy Research. This will be held in Gooch Auditorium and honors Dr. Levine, a long-standing and highly respected member of our faculty who passed away in 2020, and this is an opportunity to really celebrate her remarkable career and scientific achievements. The celebration next week will include a lecture from the inaugural winner, Dr. Noboru Mizushima, an internationally recognized researcher from the University of Tokyo. I am looking forward to hearing from Dr. Mizushima, and I hope you will join me for this special lecture in honor of our colleague, the memory of our colleague, Dr. Beth Levine.

Looking a little later in the month, Saturday, Oct. 14, will mark Weight Wellness Day, a free community event here at UT Southwestern that will provide an overview of recent advances in obesity care, an interactive healthy cooking demonstration, and an afternoon portion geared toward health care providers, including an obesity treatment bootcamp to help evaluate and support patients. The event is sponsored by the UT Southwestern Nutrition and Obesity Research Center, one of just 12 across the country, and it’s held in conjunction with the Obesity Society’s ObesityWeek 2023 here in Dallas that same week.

Also happening next month, UT Southwestern and our sister institution, UT Dallas, will formally dedicate the new five-story Texas Instruments Biomedical Engineering and Sciences Building. This building, which already is home to a number of our faculty of our newest Basic Science Department, the Department of Biomedical Engineering, as well as faculty from UT Dallas, is providing a remarkable environment for collaboration to foster innovative solutions for unmet medical need.

This facility, as I say, will deepen our collaborations to advance transformational bioengineering research that can improve patient care with advances in related fields as well – such as artificial intelligence, molecular imaging, robotics, genetic engineering – and will also further solidify North Texas as a hub for biomedical innovation. I want to extend a special thanks to Dr. Sam Achilefu, our inaugural Chair of the Department of Biomedical Engineering who joined us in 2022, for already bringing our Biomedical Engineering Department to life as an incredibly robust program of innovative faculty.

And with that, I'm going to conclude my remarks. Again, I appreciate you joining me for this, but now let's take the time to address the questions that we received from you since the last briefing at the beginning of the summer. I'm joined by [Vice President for Communications, Marketing, and Public Affairs] Jenny Doren as I have been for the prior 66 briefings to pose those questions.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Well, thank you, Dr. Podolsky. It's good to be back and you already addressed many of our questions, so I very much appreciate that. I want to let our listeners know, as we had several questions about COVID-19 vaccines, that we also have some additional details in today's UTSW newsletter. Another question that multiple people asked about is referring to a section of the state budget as passed during the most recent legislative session. Careful readers noted that in the adopted version, specifically section 17.18, section A, indicates that appropriations were made for a 5% salary increase for general state employees to begin on Sept. 1, so just a few weeks ago. Staff were interested to know if this applies to us, and if so, when we'll see an increase.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, I certainly can understand why this would've caught the attention of anybody who was as close a reader of the state budget to have taken note of this section. It should be noted though that while this appropriation is spelled out in subsection A, the following subsection C, if you read on, indicates that no such appropriation was made for employees of higher education institutions. As those listening may know, the Legislature fully funds salary costs for many state agencies and thus can mandate individual increases, or sometimes decreases, of salaries within those agencies. However, higher education institutions do not receive state appropriations to fully support our staff salary needs. Indeed, our state appropriation represents between 4% and 5% of our total revenue at UT Southwestern. And given that, the Legislature historically does not direct institutional compensation and policies.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

So sticking with the topic of finances, can you comment on how UT Southwestern is doing financially? Are there going to be layoffs? Will there be a cost of living increase?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Well, to put this in context, I note that academic medical centers and other nonacademic health care providers as well have experienced extremely challenging conditions in this past year due to inflationary cost increases, staffing and wage pressures, reduced or very, very limited increases in payor reimbursements which are not proportional to those increases in the costs, as well as some shifts in the payor mix, all of which has constituted, if not a perfect storm, certainly very challenging conditions for health systems and especially academic medical centers with their total institutional mission to go beyond providing care, but also the education, training, and research that makes them the distinctive and important institutions that they are. I would say relative to the national peer institutions, UT Southwestern has, in fact, been more successful in dealing with those challenges insofar as we did end our fiscal year '23 on Aug. 31 with a modest positive margin. Nonetheless, that margin was less than what we would need to maintain over the course of time going forward to be able to have the funds necessary to continue to invest in our facilities and all of our programs that allow us to provide the outstanding care that we do to our patients.

At the end of FY23, as we faced the challenges that I've described – rising costs, limited ability to increase the revenue because of existing contracts we have with payors – we did effect a very small

reduction in force in a few areas as we identified opportunities for greater operational efficiency. As we start fiscal year 2024, we continue to face some of those same pressures; however, the steps we took last year, and already this year, we believe will help us, again, navigate due to the positive margin, which is ultimately important to us, again, for sustaining the strength of our institution to deliver to our patients and all of our other stakeholders in the long term. We are continuing to work on opportunities for revenue enhancement as well as cost efficiencies not through reductions in force, but through alternate processes, a different way of sourcing some of the supplies that we need to be sure we're not losing sight of any opportunity to get the maximum value as stewards of the resources that we're entrusted with.

I will note that one of the very important steps we took as part of the FY24 process was to, as a starting point, determine that whatever else we needed to do to finish the budget, we would include a merit program and create an overall pool of 3%, which should now be showing up in the next paycheck for those who are in the monthly paycheck, and actually those on the biweekly paychecks would've seen it already. Well, this increased the largest part of our budget. Salaries and benefits are more than 60% of our total budget. It was important, we felt, to recognize the hard work and dedication of our employees. They are, and you are, without any doubt, the biggest and most important asset of UT Southwestern – the people who come to work here every day to deliver on the mission.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Very much appreciate that and your transparency. We have time for one more question, and I'll be sure to reach out to those who submitted other questions to provide those answers. This one is seeking clarity on the Faculty Senate, what its purpose is, and if there is an equivalent entity for staff and students. Also, how can support staff and other types of employees communicate their needs to executive leadership?

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

I really appreciate the question. Thank the individual who submitted that because UT Southwestern strives to create a culture of positive working relationships and environment where efforts are recognized and, whether it's our faculty, our staff, our learners, all feel supported in their professional growth. This includes the opportunity to actively engage and share your thoughts and ideas. I note that the Faculty Senate and its purpose are described in-depth on the UT Southwestern intranet, so I would refer the question, as well as anybody else interested in learning more, to look there for important details. The overarching goal is to clarify and/or resolve issues that impact faculty.

I do note that our Regents require that we have a body which officially represents the voice of the faculty and is a source of consultation to administrative leadership as we endeavor to advance the institution. For UT Southwestern, that entity is the Faculty Council, which comprises the Academic Department Chairs and the three leaders of the Faculty Senate. Through that body, therefore, we have the opportunity that, I can say from my perspective, benefits us greatly as an institution of surfacing issues that may not otherwise go recognized, [and] for those issues that we are wrestling with as an institution, to have the insights of our faculty.

So to spend a couple of minutes though on the other important, large segments of what makes UT Southwestern the institution it is for students, there is a centralized Student Leadership Council, which brings together student leaders from each of the three schools, and I guess now will be four, to address issues of interest or affecting all UT Southwestern Medical Center students. Such issues include, but are not limited to, tuition, fees, food service, student support services, parking, and health insurance. Three of our four schools also have an elected representative body. The School of Health Professions, it has

the Student Advisory Committee; the Graduate School, the Graduate Student Organization, or GSO; and our Medical School, the Medical School Student Government. The O'Donnell School of Public Health welcomed its inaugural classes, I mentioned at the outset of my briefing, and is in the process of forming a leadership group.

The equivalent entity for staff is the Employee Advisory Council. Representatives include administrative and professional staff elected by their peers by different districts on the campus. They meet regularly to discuss issues of significant interest to UT Southwestern employees, and I personally meet with this group at least annually, as well as have the opportunity to solicit their input over the course of the year as we are considering issues that we know will be important to our staff and to be sure that our decision making is informed by the perspectives of our staff to do our best to support their needs and the work they do here at UT Southwestern. Anyone on staff may communicate needs and concerns to leadership through your direct manager, through the Employee Advisory Council (the EAC) or by contacting a department directly. Tips for these conversations can be found in the Speak My Mind Employee Toolkit for employees, available on the intranet.

Speaker 2: Jenny Doren:

Thank you, Dr. Podolsky. We appreciate your time as always.

Speaker 1: Dr. Podolsky:

Thank you and have a great rest of the week, Jenny.