Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with high school students at Lamar Academy who won the Regional Science Olympiad and were heading to College Station to compete in the statewide tournament. For the state competition, the students needed to wear white coats and the UTRGV School of Medicine happily offered to provide them with coats.

I was heartened to hear from these students about their interest in science and was reminded of how important our work at the School of Medicine is in training the next generation of physicians and biomedical researchers. Part of our promise to the Rio Grande Valley when we started the School of Medicine was to educate, recruit and train medical students and residents who are from the Valley so they can give back to the communities that raised them. The School of Medicine has been forming partnerships and other agreements with area schools to ensure that these students are well prepared for careers in health care.
We’re already beginning to fulfill that promise. About a third of students from each class hails from the Valley and, this July, we will welcome the Class of 2023, which will have the largest number of UTRGV graduates and students from the Valley. I look forward to cloaking each new student with their own white coat, which they will wear throughout the next four years as they train for their careers in medicine and biomedical science.

Those who don the white coat have made a commitment to improve the health and well-being of the communities they serve through engaging in research and providing excellent care to patients. As you read this month’s Health Matters, you will see how serious we are in our commitment to the Valley. We recently welcomed our new cancer immunology team, which will focus its research on cancers that affect the Valley. Our faculty were recognized in a university-wide awards ceremony for their achievements in research. Our residents preparing to graduate are presenting their research on how to enhance care to patients in the Valley. Our students are presenting their research at national conferences. Their work has the potential to improve the lives of patients across the Valley and beyond.

I think it is fair to say that the UTRGV School of Medicine continues to deliver on the important promises it made only a few years ago. I personally want to thank all members of our SOM community for their daily work and commitment to our shared vision.

Kind Regards,

John H. Krouse, MD, PhD, MBA
Dean, UTRGV School of Medicine
Executive Vice President, Health Affairs

---

**News and Events**

**UTRGV SOM welcomes new cancer immunology team**

The UTRGV School of Medicine recently welcomed its new cancer immunology team with a signing ceremony at the UTRGV/UT Health RGV Biomedical Research Building.

[Read more](#)

---

**UTRGV mentoring unexpected advocates for Alzheimer’s patients, caregivers**

By Malena Hernandez, UTRGV News & Internal Communications

Among the senior citizen visitors and vendors at a recent Winter Texan event in
Alamo, a small group of high school students line-dancing looked a little out of place.

Read more

UTRGV School of Medicine donates white coats to students at Lamar Academy in McAllen for Texas Science Olympiad

John H. Krouse, MD, PhD, MBA, executive vice president for Health Affairs at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and dean of the UTRGV School of Medicine, visited with students at Lamar Academy in McAllen Tuesday, April 30, to donate 15 white coats for them to wear at the Texas Science Olympiad.

The students from Lamar Academy won first place in the Regional Science Olympiad Feb. 23 at South Texas College. They qualified to compete in the state tournament, which was held May 3-4 at Texas A&M University in College Station. According to officials at the McAllen Independent School District, the students were required to wear white coats for one of the portions of the tournament.

“The UTRGV School of Medicine is proud of the students at Lamar Academy for their accomplishment and are pleased to show our support of and cooperation with the McAllen Independent School District through this white coat donation,” Krouse said. “McAllen ISD is doing an excellent job of preparing its students for pursuing higher education and careers in the STEM fields and we look forward to more collaborations between UTRGV and the school district.”

Both Krouse and McAllen ISD officials said the donation was another opportunity to promote the ongoing collaboration and partnerships between the university and the school district.

“We appreciate the UTRGV School of Medicine for its generous donation of lab coats for our students at Lamar Academy,” said McAllen ISD Superintendent J.A. Gonzalez, Ed.D. “I also want to extend my thanks to the Dean of the School of Medicine, Dr. John Krouse, for taking time out of his busy schedule to make this a special event for our students. This will inspire them as they compete at the state level. When higher education and
SOM welcomes back prospective students for Class of 2023

The UTRGV School of Medicine earlier this month welcomed 47 of its prospective students for its Class of 2023 to visit its facilities in Edinburg and Harlingen and learn more about the opportunities the medical school provides at the School of Medicine’s Welcome Back weekend event.

The prospective students visited one of the area hospitals where they would complete their clerkships, the School of Medicine’s Clinical Education Building and the UTRGV Simulation Hospital in Harlingen, the Medical Education Building in Edinburg, and the School of Medicine’s Area Health Education Center in San Carlos, where residents of that community receive health care services from providers.

The School of Medicine has matched with 55 students for the Class of 2023. Though students who have been accepted have until May 15 to accept or decline the offer of enrollment, all of the accepted already have stated their intent to enroll at UTRGV.

With the new class, the School of Medicine will reach full enrollment at 210 students and will be among one of the most diverse medical schools in the country, with a student body that is 40 percent Hispanic, 18 percent Asian/Indian and 13 percent African American.

The incoming class also is expected to have the largest group from the Rio Grande Valley and the most UTRGV graduates of all four classes. So far, the Class of 2023 is expected to have 23 students from the Rio Grande Valley and 14 graduates of UTRGV.

Valley natives Noel Garza and Saba Suleman said they have chosen to attend medical school at UTRGV because of the tight-knit community and proximity to home. They also said they were impressed with the resources and opportunities at the School of Medicine.

“I like the fact that there’s a student-run clinic, there are opportunities to work with the promotoras firsthand and help and learn about these communities,” said Suleman, who grew up in Brownsville, earned undergraduate degrees from UTRGV in chemistry, kinesiology and psychology and is working on her master’s degree in public health at
Garza, an Edinburg resident who will graduate from UTRGV May 11 with degrees in biology and chemistry, said he enjoyed touring the simulation hospital in Harlingen and meeting his potential future classmates.

“I'm just so grateful to have this opportunity to be able to do everything here at home—I went to high school in Edinburg, college in Edinburg, now medical school in Edinburg—and I'm truly blessed to be here,” he said.

Orientation for the Class of 2023 will begin in July.

UTRGV School of Medicine to offer early decision for applicants from UTRGV, Rio Grande Valley residents

The UTRGV School of Medicine is offering applicants for the Class of 2024 who currently attend UTRGV or are from the Rio Grande Valley the opportunity to participate in the School of Medicine's new Early Decision program.

Starting May 1, UTRGV students and students from other schools who are Valley residents can fill out their applications through the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDSAS) and select the early decision option to apply to the UTRGV School of Medicine only. Interviews will be held in July and applicants will be notified in early August on whether they have been accepted into the School of Medicine.

Those applicants who are accepted are committed to UTRGV and will not need to enter the match. For those who are not accepted, the School of Medicine will notify the TMDSAS to change their application statuses from early admissions to regular admissions so that other medical schools can consider them and UTRGV can re-consider them later in the applications process.

In addition, those who are accepted are eligible for scholarships.

For more information, email MDadmissions@utrgv.edu or call (956) 296-1600.

Department of OB/GYN hosts inaugural Resident Research Day
The UTRGV School of Medicine’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology had its inaugural Resident Research Day Friday, April 26, at the Edinburg Conference Center at Renaissance.

Medical residents from the UTRGV School of Medicine Obstetrics and Gynecology Residency Program at Doctors Hospital at Renaissance gave presentations on how to enhance patient care.

This symposium fulfills a requirement for residents who are completing their training and offers those who are still training an opportunity to showcase their work. Quality improvement projects are especially important because they allow the residents and the hospitals where they train an opportunity to apply evidence-based medicine to clinical decision-making that leads to better care for patients.

The event included a keynote address from Eve Espey, MD, MPH, department chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, who spoke on “Feminism, Family Planning and Public Health.”

2nd Annual Family Medicine Research Symposium to be held May 17 at Knapp Convention Center

Come hear our Family Medicine residents present their plans to enhance patient care in the Rio Grande Valley at the second annual Family Medicine Research Symposium from noon to 5 p.m. Friday, May 17, at the Knapp Convention Center.

This event will feature quality improvement research poster presentations from residents from all three of the UTRGV School of Medicine’s Family Medicine Residency programs.

Please RSVP and send any special accommodation requests to Vicente Reyna at (956) 296-1534 or vicente.reyna@utrgv.edu.

Save the Date: 3rd Annual Research Symposium Sept. 13-14 at UTRGV SOM and McAllen Convention Center
With the theme, "Health Disparities: Community Engagement," this year's symposium will showcase research and programs that promote health equality and highlight best practices for how the scientific and medical research community can engage communities, health organizations and workers to address the common goal of eliminating health disparities.

The symposium will be held Friday, Sept. 13, at the UTRGV School of Medicine, 1210 W. Schunior St., Edinburg, and Saturday, Sept. 14, at the McAllen Convention Center, 700 Convention Center Blvd.

Visit the symposium's website to register and submit an abstract. For more information, call (956) 296-1926 or email somresearchsymposium@utrgv.edu.

New Hires

Dr. Michael Dobbs appointed Chair of Neurology at School of Medicine, Chief Medical Officer of UT Health RGV

The UTRGV School of Medicine has named Michael R. Dobbs, MD, MHCM, as the chair of the Department of Neurology for the School of Medicine and Chief Medical Officer for UT Health Rio Grande Valley.

Dr. Dobbs comes to UTRGV from the University of Kentucky College of Medicine, where he served as professor and associate dean for statewide and clinical initiatives. During his tenure, Dr. Dobbs served as co-chair of the joint implementation committee for regional medical campus expansion, where he led the effort to open four-year medical schools at three locations throughout the state. As director of the UK-Norton Healthcare Stroke Network, he built a tristate network of 34 hospitals and more than 8,000 acute stroke patients per year.

At UTRGV, Dobbs will oversee a department that will ultimately serve as a hub for a network of researchers seeking new treatments for neurological disorders and clinicians with expertise across the subspecialties of neurological care. He will also serve as Chief Medical Officer of UT Health RGV, the clinical practice of the University.

“I am extremely impressed by what is being built here, and I am excited to join the UTRGV School of Medicine team. My wife and I are looking forward to raising our daughters in the Rio Grande Valley and becoming part of your wonderful community,” Dobbs said.
Dobbs earned his medical degree and completed his residency training in neurology from the University of Kentucky. While a student at the University of Kentucky, he invented a treatment for dermatitis that was granted a U.S. patent in 2001 and has been on the small animal veterinary market for several years. He also earned a master’s degree in healthcare management from the Harvard University School of Public Health.

Upon completing his residency, Dobbs entered the United States Air Force. He oversaw neurological research and clinic operations while stationed in San Antonio from 2002-2005. He earned the rank of major while on active duty and continued in the inactive ready reserve until being honorably discharged in 2015.

Dobbs returned to the University of Kentucky in 2006 as a faculty member and director of the residency program. He quickly expanded the program from three to five trainees per year and was personally commended for his leadership by the ACGME. He was instrumental in forming a dedicated clinical stroke service at UK-Chandler Medical Center in 2007 and became medical director of the UK stroke program in 2010. Under his direction the program grew to become recognized as one of the busiest and highest-quality stroke programs in the United States with missions in clinical care, training stroke neurologists, and leading-edge research.

A recognized scholar, Dobbs has more than 70 original publications, including journal articles, book chapters and abstracts on subjects such as clinical neurology, history, and the business of healthcare. He is also known internationally for his pioneering work in Clinical Neurotoxicology. His book, “Clinical Neurotoxicology—Syndromes, Substances, Environments,” is the leading text in the field. He is associate editor of the peer-reviewed journal Quality Management in Healthcare.

Dobbs will assume his position here at UTRGV on July 1, 2019.

---

**Dr. Michael Escamilla appointed Chair of Psychiatry at UTRGV School of Medicine**

The UTRGV School of Medicine has appointed Michael Escamilla, MD, as professor and chair of the Department of Psychiatry.

Dr. Escamilla comes to UTRGV from the Paul Foster School of Medicine at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso, where he served as Founding Chair of the department of psychiatry, professor in the departments of Biomedical Sciences and Psychiatry, and director of the Center of Excellence in Neurosciences.

Escamilla completed his baccalaureate degree at Harvard University and earned his medical degree from UT Southwestern Medical School. He then completed his internship and residency in psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco. Escamilla also earned a diploma (PhD equivalent) in analytical psychology from the Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland.

In this new leadership role, Escamilla will help the department strategically grow its clinical, research and academic efforts. He will also be instrumental in preparing resident physicians for careers in Psychiatry and will expand clinical care across the Valley.
Escamilla will further our strategic goal and mission of providing the highest quality care for patients coping with mental health disorders in the Rio Grande Valley.

He will assume his position here at UTRGV on June 1, 2019.

Accolades

SOM faculty honored at UTRGV Faculty Excellence Awards and Recognition Ceremony May 2

Gladys Maestre, PhD, professor of neuroscience and human genetics and director of the UTRGV Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center for Minority Aging Research, has been awarded the Faculty Excellence Award in Research from UTRGV for her research on Alzheimer's disease.

Maestre was also recognized for the $3.2 million grant she received from the National Institutes of Health to develop the Rio Grande Valley Alzheimer's Resource Center for Minority Aging Research: Partnerships for Progress.

She received her award at the Faculty Excellence Awards and Recognition Ceremony May 2 in Edinburg.

Also recognized at the ceremony were:
- Dr. John Blangero, PhD, professor of Human Genetics and director of the Genomics Computing Center at the South Texas Diabetes and Obesity Institute, for the grants he was awarded from the National Institutes of Health on Fatty Liver Disease and from the Boston Children's Hospital for his research on Imaging Genomics of the Aging Brain.
- Joanne Curran, PhD, professor of Human Genetics, was recognized for the National Institutes of Health grant she received for her research on Genetic Determinants of Lipidomic Variation and their Role in Cardiovascular Disease Risk.
- John H. Krouse, MD, PhD, MBA, executive vice president of Health Affairs and dean of the UTRGV School of Medicine, for being awarded a grant from the Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation to attract and retain physicians in the Rio Grande Valley.
- Sarah Williams-Blangero, PhD, HEB Distinguished Chair in Diabetes and Genomics and director of the South Texas Diabetes and Obesity Institute, was recognized for the grant she received from the Knapp Community Care Foundation to conduct genomic research related to diabetes among residents in the Mid-Valley.

SOM medical student Patrick Ojeaga presents poster at New England Science Symposium

Patrick Ojeaga, a Class of 2021 student at the UTRGV School of Medicine, presented his poster, titled "Pediatric Type II Supracondylar Humerus Fractures Factors Associated with Successful Closed Reduction and Immobilization" at the New England Science Symposium last month.
SOM student Sarah Miller presents poster at ARVO conference

Sarah Miller, a Class of 2021 student at the UTRGV School of Medicine, presented her poster, titled "Genetic analysis localizes a novel locus on chromosome 4q for the glaucoma endophenotype, cup-to-disc ratio: The Jiri Eye Study," at the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology, April 28-May 2, in Vancouver, Canada.

Andrea Cepeda named Student Employee of the Year

Congratulations to Andrea Cepeda, a student graphic designer for the UTRGV School of Medicine, who was selected as the Student Employee of the Year. She received her award at the Student Employee of the Year Award Banquet April 12.

Every year colleges and universities across the country recognize the importance of the student work experience during National Student Employment Week. Student employees perform invaluable services with enthusiasm, dedication, and initiative.

Anna Olivarez featured in UTRGV Unsung Heroes series

Congratulations to Anna Olivarez, an administrative associate at the UTRGV School of Medicine, for being featured in the UTRGV Unsung Heroes series produced by UTRGV News & Internal Communications. Read the story here.

In the Spotlight

Vanessa Sanchez, Class of 2022

Vanessa Sanchez, a first-year medical student from McAllen, Texas, is the academic chair for the Class of 2022 and a member of the UTRGV School of Medicine’s Student Government Association. She completed her undergraduate degree from UTRGV.

Sanchez’s clinical interest is in obstetrics and gynecology and is interested in community-based research for health
issues that affect the Rio Grande Valley.

Great things are happening at the UTRGV School of Medicine. Learn more about the SOM Strategic Plan.

Your gift to the School of Medicine supports our mission to educate a diverse group of medical students and future scientists to benefit the Rio Grande Valley and the world.

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine
Email: AskUTRGVsom@utrgv.edu
Phone: (956) 296-1900