



Scoop

Aug. 2, 2002

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL AT HOUSTON

Events to Know

August

- 2 Today. Summer Research Program Closing Ceremony**, for undergraduates and first year medical students, 9 a.m., MSB 2.006. Abstracts will be presented later as part of the Research Forum in November.
- 7 Clinical Research Curriculum, Scientific Writing Workshop, "Results, Discussion, Abstract, and References,"** presented by **Dr. Maureen Goode, Michael Worley, and Mariann Crapanzano,** 5 - 6:30 p.m., MSB 2.135.
- 14 White Coat Ceremony**, for the Class of 2006, 6:30 p.m., Edwin Hornberger Conference Center, 2151 W. Holcombe Blvd. **Dr. Oscar Rosales**, keynote speaker.

UTMost Interest

Houston City Councilman **Michael Berry** has formed Houston Medical Breakthrough, an ad hoc committee of prominent local *Houston Medical* supporters. A press conference is planned for Wed., **August 7**. The medical series had the best showing in total viewers after its sixth show last week...**Dr. Henry Strobel**, associate dean, Faculty Affairs, assistant dean, Student Affairs, and professor, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, was the session chair at the Gordon Research Conference July 14-19, in Plymouth, N.H. Other attendees were **Yasushi Kikuta**, a fellow, and graduate students **Lepa Antonovic, Cheri Turman, Eric Williams, Sayee Anakk** and **Avinash Kalsotra**.

SALES TAX HOLIDAY - Just in time before school, most clothing and footwear priced under \$100 is tax-free this weekend, **Aug. 2, 3, and 4**, beginning at 12:01 a.m. Friday and ending at midnight Sunday. For more information, see <www.window.state.tx.us>.

DR. CURTIS SELECTED FOR THREE-YEAR FELLOWSHIP

Beginning in September, **Dr. Michele Curtis**, associate professor, Obstetrics and Gynecology, will start a three-year fellowship in Washington, D.C., to study and learn how national health policy is developed. The Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship was awarded to Curtis and six other health-care professionals after the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science conducted a national search and interview process. The program is geared toward supporting outstanding mid-career health professionals. The fellows will later help develop legislative proposals, arrange hearings, brief legislators for committee sessions and floor debates, and participate with staff in House and Senate conferences. "My first few projects will probably involve health care for women and children because that's my area of expertise," Curtis said.



Dr. Michele Curtis (r.), talks with a patient.

For the last two years of the program, she will return to Houston to work directly for **President James T. Willerson**. She expects to focus on health care issues for the uninsured and underinsured.

FOUNDERS' FUN FEST HELPS CELEBRATE 30TH ANNIVERSARY

All UT-Houston students, faculty, and staff are invited to the inaugural Founders' Fun Fest, 2 - 6 p.m., Fri., **Oct. 11**, as part of UT-Houston's 30th anniversary events that are occurring throughout the year. The festival will take place on the grounds of the UT-Harris County Psychiatric Center. Guests will enjoy live music by "Nobody's Fool," catering by "Pappas Bar-B-Q," special giveaways, and more. Shuttle service will be available. For more information see <http://www.uthouston.edu/anniversary/founders_fun/index.htm>. To sign up to volunteer, call 713-500-3130.



RECIPE FOR SERENITY - HERMANN PARK'S JAPANESE GARDEN

Free of admission, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., and nestled in the heart of urban Houston, lies a secret garden —Hermann Park's Japanese Garden — a hidden treasure waiting to embrace its guests in a blanket of beauty. The Japanese Garden is located along the carriage path that winds around the playground area, parallel to Fannin. Filled with tranquility and serenity, the garden's shaded paths wind through lush vegetation as one strolls over wooden footbridges atop rippling waterways. The garden is designed by world-renowned Japanese landscape architect, Ken Nakijima, and can be enjoyed daily. For more information, contact Lisa Cuccia, 713-524-5876, ext. 333.



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PRACTICE PLAN COLLECTIONS BREAK RECORD

The Medical School's practice plan has shown marked improvement over the past quarter, breaking a record for gross collections.

"In the history of the practice plan, we broke records each month and over a three month period. That is something to be proud of. Physician Billing Services is doing an excellent job," said **Dr. James T. Willerson**, UT-Houston president, at the Medical Service Research and Development Plan (MSRDP) Board meeting July 24. Gross collections for the entire practice plan, MSRDP and University Care Plus (UCP), exceeded \$8 million each month during March, April, and May 2002.

"We're collecting almost \$400,000 a day," said **Kevin Dillon**, UT-Houston chief financial officer. "We're doing better on charges, and collections are happily following."

The entire practice plan had a profit of \$2.4 million for the period of March-June 2002. The prognosis for the practice plan looks good, as it is bouncing back from its loss of \$6 million over the first six months of the fiscal year, September 2001 – February 2002.

Based on 10 months of the entire practice plan's operations, through June 30, 2002, the practice plan has a loss of \$3.5 million. Dillon said he anticipates that at the end of 12 months (i.e., the entire fiscal year 2002), the practice plan should approximately "break even" when the anticipated physician liability insurance (PLI) rebate of \$2 million (expected in August) is factored in.

MSRDP is the "trust fund" for the university's clinical services and its board members are the Medical School's department chairmen and at-large members, who are elected by the faculty. UCP is the business arm of the clinical operation.

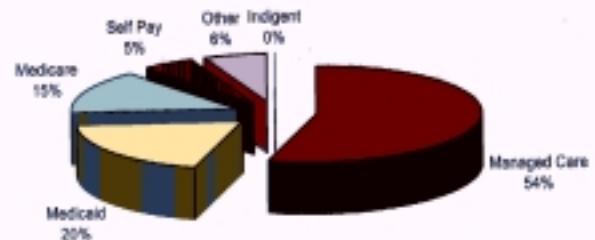
Dan Marino, of Health Directions, which took over the management of Physician Billing Services (PBS) Dec. 10, said that several processes are being revamped across the UT Physician Offices to improve efficiency. One of these systems is the UCP referral process, which is being standardized with the referral coordinator as the point of contact for each office, managing referrals for the patients and physicians.

"Our objectives are that a patient's referral will be authorized at the time of appointment, and that the patient will not receive any unnecessary bills," he said. "Our goal also is to eliminate emergent referrals, which have to be processed immediately because a patient has arrived at a specialist's office without a referral."

Check-in and check-out processes also are being streamlined, which has resulted in a reduction of errors from 17 percent to 8 percent, with a goal of 3 percent. And, in a cooperative effort with UCP, PBS is piloting an electronic Medicare edit process, which they plan to broaden for use with other payers. New patient statements will be implemented Aug. 7, and the implementation of the paperless collection system is 75 percent complete, Marino said.

Security was at the forefront of Dr. Willerson's mind as he pointed out that a recent state audit revealed problems with the security of some physicians' computers. "Privacy must be guaranteed, and violators will be fined for not complying. The state auditors were not impressed by our efforts in this area, and we have until the end of September to comply," he said.

UT PHYSICIANS - UCP OFFICES
PATIENT MIX
ALL OFFICES
YTD FY 2002



Dean Max Buja, M.D., added that the Medical School has been working on inventorying all computers, determining which may house sensitive information. "All sensitive information will be located on servers in one area with a firewall to prevent outsiders from having access," he said, adding that such a server farm will cost \$1 million.

Diana Browning, vice president of clinical operations for UCP, spoke about UCP's new customer-service initiative, the Ideal Patient Experience (See *Scoop*, July 12). "Two of our biggest customer service challenges are telecommunication and wait times," she said. "Currently our satisfaction rate is at 79 percent on telecommunication – taken from patient surveys from those who rate it 'good' or 'very good.' And our wait time satisfaction rate is 70 percent. Our goal for each of these areas is 85 percent, and part of the implementation of the Ideal Patient Experience will help us achieve this goal."

Browning also explained the patient mix of all UT Physician Offices (See graph above). Managed care patients make up the majority of patients; however, this category includes patients on Medicaid HMO.

Browning also revealed data regarding patient scheduling. "The good news is that the number of arrivals are increasing, however our number of no-shows have remained at the same percent throughout this time," she said. The number of arrivals for May 2002 was 16,615, and the number of no-shows during this month was 3,922. The goal for no-shows is to reduce the rate from 15 percent to 13 percent.

In other news:

- Voting is under way for new at-large members. Physicians who are members of MSRDP will receive a ballot via e-mail.
- UCP has accepted the termination of the HMO Blue of Texas contract.
- The first UCP-sponsored *Physician Practice Digest* magazine was mailed to 6,500 practicing physicians.
- UCP will unveil billboards around Houston the first week of August, touting UT Physicians as the doctors of the television show, "Houston Medical."
- **Julie Page**, UCP's new director of finance and accounting, was introduced.

The MSRDP Board will meet again in October. - **D. Brown**