



## [Seton, UT lay foundations for Austin medical school](#)

By Patrick Brendel and Rob Heidrick Friday, 26 March 2010

**An April open house will mark the official launch of the Dell Pediatric Research Institute: the latest measured step toward establishing a world-class academic health center, including a medical school, in Austin.**

The institute—a collaboration between the University of Texas at Austin and Seton Family of Hospitals—is strategically located in the Mueller Development, near the UT campus and right across the street from Seton’s Dell Children’s Medical Center of Central Texas. The objective is for UT researchers to mingle with Dell physicians and swap ideas about research, how it relates to practical medicine, and vice versa.

“In a sense, Dell represents a bridge between UT Austin and clinical enterprise. It is a very important step,” said Dr. Kenneth Shine, UT System executive vice chancellor for Health Affairs.

The institute, with a total projected capacity of 28 senior faculty members, is the first of several planned UT Austin research institutes on 30 acres of land at Mueller. It is a prime example of the kind of translational research activity that large biotech companies seek out when deciding where to locate.

The institute cost about \$100 million to establish, including \$38 million from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and \$45 million from the UT System.

In order to establish a UT Austin medical school, an even more robust combination of public and private funding is needed.

## Billions of dollars on the line

It will take, at minimum, \$1.5 billion in new resources to create a four-year medical school in Austin, said UT Austin Executive Vice President and Provost Steven Leslie.

“We are currently not in the most favorable economic circumstances to get this done right now, but we will have to do it with new resources as we go forward,” he said, stressing that university officials will not take funding away from existing UT entities to build a UT Austin medical school.

UT officials would not give a time frame for the creation of a medical school, saying it depends on a general economic recovery, and would require funding from a variety of sources, such as philanthropy, businesses, state government and/or local taxes.

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Putting resources toward a medical school could be a wise long-term investment, according to a report released in February 2008 by The Perryman Group, an economic research firm in Waco.

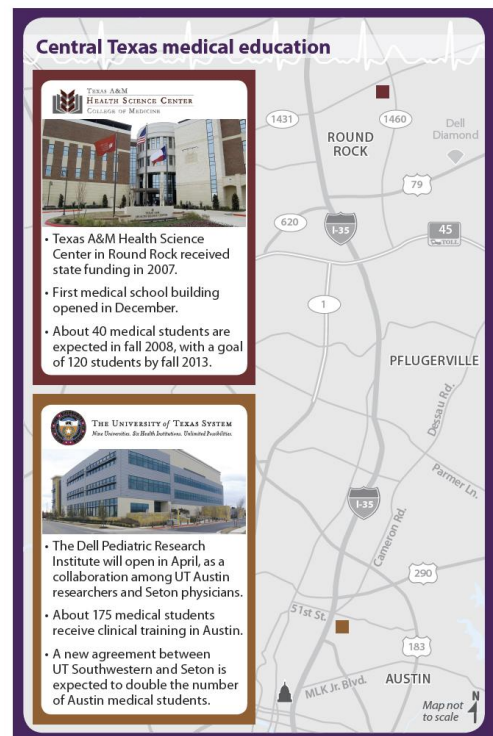
The firm estimated that establishing a major medical school in Austin would bring nearly \$27 billion to the region each year, assuming the medical school would allow Texas to achieve a concentration of biotech companies equivalent to the national average. If Texas were to achieve a biotech concentration equivalent to Massachusetts and California, the economic impact doubles.

The long-term forecast should not be affected by the general economic downturn in the last two years, said Ray Perryman, president of The Perryman Group.

## Seton, UT, UT Southwestern

In November, Seton finalized a new agreement with UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, which will take over residency programs previously run by UT Medical Branch at Galveston.

The new Seton–UT Southwestern Institute for Clinical Investigation is expected to double the number of graduate medical students doing residencies in Seton’s Austin-area hospitals, with a goal of 350 residents each year.



The new affiliation is a major step toward establishing a full-scale medical school at UT Austin, said Seton President and CEO Charles Barnett. Many third- and fourth-year graduate medical students already do their clinical training in Central Texas, he said.

“We have all the components you would normally find in a medical school, with the exception of first- and second-year students,” Barnett said.

“All we need is those first two years—which in some ways is the least important, but it’s obviously something we still want,” said Greg Hartman, president and CEO of Seton’s University Medical Center Brackenridge, which hosts many of the residents.

Hartman said UT officials, while not making promises, have told him they anticipate creating a medical school in five to 10 years.

“There’s been no commitment, but we definitely think we’re on the path to doing that,” he said.

The proposed UT Austin medical school would be the first medical school in Texas physically contiguous with a major university. The ultimate vision is to create an academic health center, comprising a medical school, research and practical medicine, on par with top institutions such as Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Stanford and Washington, Shine said.

St. David’s HealthCare, which hosts clinical rotations for students from the Texas A&M Health Science Center in Round Rock, is also looking to expand its involvement with UT Austin, St. David’s Senior Vice President Mark Clayton said.

Physicians at St. David’s Austin research centers, including the NeuroTexas Institute and the Texas Cardiac Arrhythmia Institute, could work with UT students in future residency and fellowship programs, he said.

## **Medical school in Round Rock**

In 2007, Texas legislators approved the establishment of a medical school in Williamson County. In December, the Texas A&M Health Science Center in Round Rock’s first campus building opened.

The Health Science Center’s College of Medicine began offering clinical clerkships to third- and fourth-year medical students in Round Rock in 2008. Since then, the school has established agreements or partnerships with every major healthcare institution in Williamson County.

Meanwhile, the first students will attend the new College of Nursing at the Health Science Center in June. The adjacent Texas State University’s Round Rock Higher Education Center is adding its own nursing school, too.

## Different objectives

The A&M Health Science Center's focus on "community-based care" is different from the UT-Seton partnership's goal of a full-blown academic health center, said Mark Hazelwood, president and CEO of the north market of the Seton Family of Hospitals, which includes Seton Williamson.

"I see A&M's objectives as a little bit different from UT Southwestern's, in that A&M is really focused on producing practicing physicians and nurses," Hazelwood said. "While that's part of UT's goal, they also are focused on producing academicians with double degrees in law and medicine or other types of things."

The Health Science Center's Temple campus has a research affiliation with Scott & White's flagship hospital, and the College of Medicine has academic research programs in College Station. Still, A&M is better known for training practical physicians than conducting medical research, Shine said.

"A&M is primarily a community-based institution," Shine said. "That they will try to do research in Williamson County is entirely appropriate. They will not be part of a research-intensive academic health center like in Austin."

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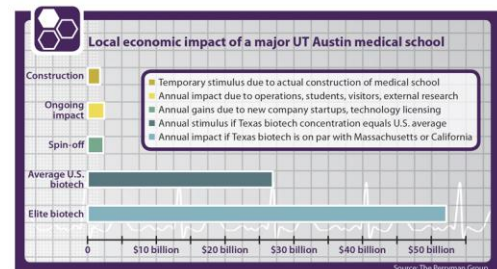
## Collaboration, competition

A&M and UT officials contend that their overlapping ambitions to create medical schools are being pursued amicably. Part of the reason for that is practical: Animosity might cause both schools to lose out on potential funding, Hazelwood said.

"From a political standpoint, they don't want to get into a competition with each other before the legislature as they try to attract funding for different programs," he said.

Regional challenges also behoove the two universities to work together. Central Texas has a major shortage of doctors, with about 155 physicians per 100,000 people, compared to the national average of about 220. A&M-Round Rock and UT Austin medical schools could help address that shortage, while improving indigent care and boosting the economy, Hartman said.

"I don't think there's a competitive sense to this at all. I think it's really a collaborative sense, in that both schools offer different strengths to what they bring to Central Texas," Hartman said. "And in Central Texas we need so much in terms of academic medicine and we have so much potential to take advantage of it."



Medical schools serve different functions in their home communities, depending on the region's needs and the goals of the institutions. While every school has its own approach, two distinct models of medical education have taken shape as the Texas A&M Health Science Center and the University of Texas discuss ideas for future programs.

### **Community-based medical education**

- Students training to practice medicine work closely with local hospitals and clinics, interacting directly with patients and learning how to treat them in a real-world setting.
- Community physicians often serve as advisers and clerkship faculty.
- In Round Rock, the Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine provides clinical training for third- and fourth-year medical students, offering rotations in family medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, psychiatry and surgery.
- A&M's local partners include Lone Star Circle of Care, Seton Medical Center Williamson, St. David's Round Rock Medical Center and Scott & White Healthcare—Round Rock.
- The College of Nursing will partner with Seton on an accelerated nursing program.
- Other community-based medical programs are offered at UT Medical Branch at Galveston, Baylor College of Medicine and UT Southwestern.

### **Research-intensive medical education**

- Medical schools work with hospitals to recruit researchers in a range of scientific disciplines.
- Hospitals, with input from their partner universities, determine the focus of research. The university typically invites researchers to serve on faculty.
- Researchers usually come with grants to study new medicines and technologies, assisted by graduate students working toward advanced degrees.
- The University of Texas System recently made an agreement with the Seton Family of Hospitals to send graduate students from the UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas to conduct their rotations in Seton's Austin-area hospitals.
- The new Seton—UT Southwestern Institute for Clinical Investigation will employ about 16 research scientists in its first year.
- The Dell Pediatric Research Institute, a venture between Seton and UT Austin, opens in April.
- Other examples of research-oriented universities include Harvard, Johns Hopkins and Stanford.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**