Chairman’s Message

As I look back on my first six months at UTMB, I want to thank Dr. Courtney Townsend, Ms. Barbara Petit, and Ms. Michelle Acosta as well as the entire UTMB faculty and staff for their outstanding efforts in making my transition seamless.

I have inherited a Department with a rich academic tradition. Under Dr. Townsend’s leadership, in 2014, the Department finished 27th in NIH funding among Departments of Surgery up from 33rd in 2013. UTMB’s NIH research portfolio continues its long history of success having more funding than all Departments of Surgery in Texas combined.

With two new hospitals nearing completion and the unprecedented growth in the regional population we serve, UTMB is primed for success and continued expansion. Evidence of our ability to take advantage of both the expanded clinical markets and the health system’s investments are manifest by an approximate 15% increase in clinical productivity for the first six months of the 2015 academic year.

Building on the framework of Dr. Thompson and Dr. Townsend, we have begun a five year strategic planning process to ensure UTMB’s Surgery Department ranking as one of the top 20 academic surgical programs in the country.

We are aggressively recruiting new faculty to expand the depth and breadth of our clinical coverage across every Division in the Department. In addition, we were successful in recruiting an exceptionally talented new class of interns and fellows who will begin their training programs in late June. I am excited to play a key role in the development of these future leaders of academic surgery and hope you will help me in welcoming them to Galveston.

It is also a pleasure to report that our outstanding chief residents are completing the last phases of their training and have secured an array of outstanding fellowships and job opportunities. Their future success will reflect the outstanding academic training they have received at UTMB.

I am excited about the expansion of UTMB surgery and look forward to creatively working with everyone to fulfill our missions of clinical excellence, educating surgical leaders, and promoting inventive research to improve the quality of patient care. We have a lot of hard work ahead of us as we strive to grow, but the rewards for further elevating the stature of the Department will be seen in our ability to continue to attract the best faculty and students as well as continue to improve the quality of care we provide to our patients.

Sincerely,

Douglas Tyler
John Woods Harris Distinguished Chair
Professor and Chairman
Department of Surgery, University of Texas Medical Branch
To remove the gallbladder or not — that is the question

January 2, 2015

Gallbladder removal is one of the most common operations performed in older adults. Yet, research from the University of Texas Medical Branch shows many patients who would benefit most from the surgery don’t get it. A previous study by the UTMB researchers showed that a combination of factors — age, sex, race, other associated illnesses and severity of gallbladder symptoms, for example — put a patient in the most danger for acute gallbladder attack. This study resulted in the creation of a predictive model for determining patients at most risk — and thus, most likely to benefit from having their gallbladders removed. Then the researchers put their predictive model to the test.

Their new study looks at 11 years of billing records of more than 160,000 Texas Medicare patients, 66 and older, who had an initial episode of gallstone trouble. The researchers used their predictive model to determine which of these patients was most likely headed for a dangerous gallbladder attack over the course of two years. The patients in the highest risk category should be receiving gallbladder removal surgery most often. But the UTMB study, available online in the January edition of the Journal of the American College of Surgeons, showed the reverse to be true. Removal of the gallbladder did not seem to depend on risk and in the healthiest patients, those in the most danger had their gallbladders removed least often.

Dr. Taylor Riall, professor of surgery at UTMB and lead author of the study, said that even though gallbladder removal is recommended for patients with gallstone problems, less than a quarter of patients in this study had their gallbladders removed.

“We sought to determine whether the decision to have the gallbladder removed was actually based on their risk of having gallstone-related complications in the next two years,” Riall said.

Using their model, the researchers identified which patients were in low, moderate or high-risk categories for an acute gallbladder episode that required hospitalization. This new study validates the accuracy of their predictive model. Among those who did not have their gallbladder removed, less than 20 percent in the low-risk group ended up being hospitalized for gallbladder-related issues — for the high-risk group, 65 percent were hospitalized within two years of first symptoms.

In looking at patients who had the surgery, the study showed risk was not related to removal of the gallbladder. Only 22 percent of people in the low-risk group, 21 percent in the moderate-risk group and 23 percent in the high-risk group had their gallbladder removed. Gallbladder removal was performed in 34 percent of low-risk patients but in only 27 percent of the highest-risk patients. Also, less than 10 percent of patients who did not have their gallbladder removed even saw a surgeon after the initial episode.

The risk of developing gallstones increases with age. While a person under 40 has about an eight percent chance of developing gallstones, the risk jumps to more than 50 percent in people 70 years and older. Gallbladder disease is the most common cause of acute abdominal pain in older patients and removal of the gallbladder accounts for a third of abdominal operations in patients over 65.

The UTMB risk prediction model provides a starting point for individualized care and shared decision making in
older patients with gallstones. Integrating this model into clinical practice, especially at the level of the primary care physician, may improve outcomes by increasing elective gallbladder removal rates in the patients at highest risk and prevent future complications in this vulnerable population. This information would also allow physicians to avoid gallbladder removal in patients who are a high surgical risk and at low risk for developing complications from their gallstones.

In patients with lower risk and the decision for gallbladder removal is based on preference, this information can help patients make decisions in the context of their symptoms and the impact on their quality of life.

The other authors of this paper include Deepak Adhikari, Abhishek Parmar, Suzanne Linder, Francesca Dimou, Winston Crowell, Nina Tamirisa, Courtney Townsend, Jr. and James Goodwin. This paper was supported by the National Institutes of Health and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The study was presented at the 126th annual meeting of the Southern Surgical Association.

Article reprinted courtesy of the UTMB Health Department of Media Relations.

Surgeons featured in Southwest in flight magazine

Surgeons from UTMB Health Department of Surgery were recently featured in ads and news articles in Southwest Airlines’ in flight magazine.

The ads with Guillermo Gomez, M.D., Kimberly M. Brown, M.D., and Joel Patterson, M.D. are part of UTMB Health’s ongoing series on minimally invasive healthcare. The ads focus on how our top healthcare providers use state-of-the-art technology and equipment to provide superior treatment to patients in the Houston-Galveston area. The ads go on to recognize how these surgeons are involved in teaching this art to residents and students.

The second mention of Department of Surgery staff was in an article on health and sleep in the new year. In a photo taken outdoors at the Specialty Care Center at Victory Lakes, Guillermo Gomez, M.D. and Obos I. Ekhaese, D.O. were part of a group of healthcare workers from UTMB.
Annual holiday door decorating contest

Barbara Shouse, 1st Place, 6.206 JSA
Texas Christmas

Kristin Harris and Janet Alleman, 2nd Place, 6.146 JSA–Oh Deer

Eileen Figueroa, 3rd Place, 6.160 JSA
Gingerbread House
Faculty Notes

Worsham Retirement

It is with sadness that I announce that effective March 1st, 2015 Dr. Sidney A. Worsham will resign his position as an Assistant Professor in the Division of Urology. Dr. Worsham joined our Division in January 2010. In April 2011, in recognition to his many contributions to our program, he was appointed to be the holder of the Stephen A. Worsham, MD Professorship in Urology. His contributions to the Urology Division have been invaluable. His teaching to the residents and junior faculty, and his clinical care have had significant impact in our program, particularly in the areas of robotic and urethral reconstructive surgery.

My gratitude to Dr. Worsham for all his dedication is beyond measure. I am certain that this sentiment is shared by other urology faculty, our residents, and his patients.

Eduardo Orihuela, MD
Michael W. Warren Distinguished Professor
Chief, Division of Urology
Section Head, Urologic Oncology
Director, Urology Residency Program

New Faculty

William B. Norbury, M.D.
Assistant Professor, Plastic Surgery

Clinical Interests: Acute and reconstructive burn surgery; sepsis; nutrition in critical care; wound healing; scarring; medical education

Research Interests: Sepsis; burn metabolism; scarring

Shout Outs

The following mentions of our Surgery faculty appeared in the UTMB Health System Friday Focus in January.

“Dr. Aaron Mohanty, our neurosurgeon and his team always were professional, courteous and conscientious. They took their time answering our questions and concerns.” (Neurosurgery)

“My surgeon, Dr. Emmanuel Amulraj and his assistant, Kathleen were just wonderful. I felt loved and encouraged.” (Cardiothoracic Surgery)

“Dr. Kimberly Brown was amazing. She made me feel like I was her only patient and that I was important to her.” (General Surgery)
Resident Notes

Plastic Surgery Chief Residents Postgraduate Positions

Zachary Hurwitz, M.D.
Hand Fellowship
UT Southwestern,
Dallas, Texas

Oscar Masters, M.D.
Private Practice
Oklahoma City,
Oklahoma

Brentley Taylor, M.D.
Hand Fellowship
Florida Orthopaedic
Institute, Tampa, Florida

Urology abstract accepted to 2015 AUA Meeting

The Program Abstract Review Committee of the American Urological Association has accepted the Division of Urology’s abstract entitled “Impact of Matching Educational Materials to Learning Style on Robotic Surgical Skills Training” at their 2015 Annual Meeting to be held in New Orleans, Louisiana, May 15-19, 2015.

Justin Fang, M.D.
Susan E. Tarry, M.D.
Match Day 2015

New General Surgery PGY-1s

Claire Cummins
UTMB

Byron Hughes
Georgetown University

Heriberto Juarez
UTMB

Rochelle Kling
UT-Southwestern

Priscilla Nobecourt
Boston Children’s Hospital

Marantha McLean (Prelim)
UTMB
New Plastic Surgery PGY-1s

Andrew Berry
UT-Houston

Thu-Hoai (Cecelia) Nguyen
USF Health Morsani

Blake Sparks
University of Louisville

Benjamin (Ben) Yarbrough
UTMB

New Upper Level Plastic Surgery Residents

PGY-2
Jillian McLaughlin
University of California San Francisco

PGY-3
Kristen Aliano
Stony Brook University

PGY-3
Stefanos Boukovalas
Temple University Hospital

PGY-4
Danielle Andry
University of Kansas Medical Center
New Neurosurgery PGY-1s

- Randall Zain Allison
  University of Hawaii

- Ken Maynard
  Marshall University

New Vascular Surgery PGY-1

- Christine Li
  UT-San Antonio

New Oral Surgery PGY-1

- Joshua S. Manuel
  The University of Tennessee Health Science Center

New Urology PGY-1

- Christopher Kosarek
  UTMB
Photo Gallery

Santa Hustle Half Marathon & 5k Texas, December 21, 2014

Aramco Houston Half Marathon, January 18, 2015
Plastic Surgery Holiday Party
Texas Society of Plastic Surgeons 2014

SCIENTIFIC SECOND:
Mariela Lopez, MD – UTMB
Surgical Timing and the Menstrual Cycle in Young Breast Reduction Patients Affect Wound Healing
Plastic Surgery Visiting Professor – January 21, 2015

J. Peter Rubin, M.D.
Chair of the Department of Plastic Surgery; UPMC Endowed Professor of Plastic Surgery, and Professor of Bioengineering
University of Pittsburgh

Plastic Surgery Visiting Professor – February 18, 2015

Joan E. Lipa, M.D.
Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Simulation Center, Organ Donation Simulation – January 20, 2015

Simulation Center, Respiratory Therapy Simulation – March 24, 2015