Dear Alumni, Colleagues and Friends,

Please join me, our staff, residents, and faculty in celebrating Family Medicine’s 35th year as an independent department at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. The Department of Family Medicine is dedicated to advancing family-centered health care through our programs in education, research, and clinical service. We strive to provide outstanding evidence-based, compassionate patient care, educate and inspire physicians dedicated to life long learning, and increase collaboration in, funding for and visibility of research and scholarly activity related to primary care.

We have made great progress in the last three and a half decades. Our largest legacy is our family physician graduates now totaling more than 250; over 60% are practicing in Texas. In addition, each year we record approximately 40,000 patient visits in our Family Medicine and Urgent Care clinics, produce a third-year clerkship for over 200 medical students and conduct over a million dollars of extramurally funded research of which more than one-third is funded by the National Institutes of Health.

I hope you will enjoy this report. It provides a brief review of our programs and activities, a summary of some of our accomplishments, and an introduction to our faculty and staff. I am very proud to be part of such a dedicated group of men and women.

Best Regards,

Dr. Barbara Thompson, MD
Chairman
Department of Family Medicine
The Department of Family Medicine at the University of Texas Medical Branch began in 1969 as a division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health and was established as an independent department in 1971.

Today, the Department of Family Medicine consists of 28 faculty, 28 residents, and 32 staff members. Together, we train medical students and residents, conduct research supported by approximately $1 million in extramural funding, and record approximately 40,000 outpatient, inpatient, and Urgent Care visits.

The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston was recognized in 2005 by a study published in Family Medicine as the 34th among United States medical schools for graduates entering residencies in family medicine, and 2nd among Texas medical schools.* The Family Medicine Clerkship was the highest-ranked third-year clerkship at UTMB from 2000 to 2005, and was the second-highest ranked third-year clerkship at UTMB in 2006.

Family Medicine’s Predoctoral Program faculty and staff have developed the award-winning Design A Case online application for building and serving web-based case studies to students. Two of the Predoctoral Program faculty, Gurjeet Shokar, M.D., and Robert Bulik, Ph.D., were awarded the 2006 Society of Teachers in Family Medicine Innovative Program Award for the program’s Design A Case software. Drs. Shokar and Bulik were also recognized by the University of Texas System at its Innovations in Medical Education Annual Conference and won the Innovation in Medical Education Award and a grant from the its Medical Education Small Grants Program. The software is now used by four other programs at UTMB, as well as courses at Pennsylvania State College of Medicine, University of New England, New York Chiropractic College and the Texas A&M Health Science Center.

The Family Medicine Residency Program was reaccredited in 2005 for four years. For two consecutive years, all graduating residents have passed the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) General Family Practice Certification Examination. In 2005 and 2006, three resident projects were awarded funding through the Joint Grant Awards Program of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.

In 2005, the Department of Family Medicine’s Research Program was supported by more than $1 million in funding. More than one-third of this funding is from the National Institute of Health (NIH) and its agencies. The Research Program’s clinical research group conducted 5 clinical trials in 2005 and has enrolled more than 1,500 patients in its studies since 1999.

Clinical Faculty

Syed Azhar, M.D.

Ramona Carter, M.D.

Alvah R. Cass, M.D., S.M.

Maria Guidry, M.D.

Jamal Islam, M.D., M.S.

James King, M.D.

Indu Kunchar, M.D.

Chris Mast, M.D., M.S.

Julie McKee, M.D.

Lisa Nash, D.O.

Alice O’Donell, M.D.

Michael Olson, Ph.D.

Jennifer Raley, M.D.

Angela Shepherd, M.D.

Gurjeet Shokar, M.D.

Navkiran Shokar, M.D., M.P.H.

Victor Sierpina, M.D.
September 2005 brought great tragedy and challenges to the Gulf Coast. Hurricane Katrina wreaked great destruction of property and life along with the displacement of thousands of people, and prompted UTMB and the Department of Family Medicine to take action.

Family Medicine physicians Janice Smith, M.D., M.P.H. and Donna Weaver, M.D., along with their colleagues, provided physician leadership in Galveston to supply medical triage and care at the temporary Red Cross Shelter set up at a local church. Many faculty, residents, and staff generously donated their time and expertise, as well as clothing and other supplies for those in need.

The Family Medicine Clerkship, in conjunction with the School of Medicine, took in displaced medical students and helped them to continue their studies despite the destruction of their own institutions’ facilities.

Non Clinical Faculty

Robert Bullik, Ph.D.
Michael Callaway, M.S.
Nita Caskey, M.A.
Leah Fanuell, LMSW
Susan Weller, Ph.D.
Ron Williams, M.S., M.Ed.
The Family Medicine Predoctoral Program saw a change in leadership during 2005 when Alice Anne O’Donell, M.D., stepped down after five years as director. Gurjeet Shokar, M.D., assumed the role of director in addition to continuing as course director of the clerkship.

Predoctoral faculty are active in the medical school curriculum. In addition to the required third-year clerkship, the Practice of Medicine Year One course is led by Donna Weaver, M.D., and the Year Three Clinical Skills Week course is led by Ramona Carter, M.D. Several faculty also serve as course directors for our approximately 20 elective and selective offerings. Predoctoral faculty also serve as examiners for the fourth-year Integrative Curriculum Evaluation Exercise (ICCE).

The required third-year clerkship is a four-week ambulatory community-based rotation at family medicine clinical sites across Texas. The clerkship faculty include both campus-based faculty and community faculty from across the state. The clerkship has consistently been one of the highest ranked School of Medicine clerkships over the past decade. Predoctoral faculty and staff have also been at the cutting edge of educational innovation: most recently the Design A Case project garnered local, state, and national awards for its innovative online authoring tool and the library of interactive web-based cases for medical student education.

The Predoctoral Program hosts the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Center for Training in International Health, led by Janice Smith, M.D., as well as the Complementary and Alternative Medicine initiative, led by Victor Sierpina, M.D. Both programs have contributed considerably to medical student education.

The PAHO/WHO Collaborating Center for Training in International Health is directed by Janice K. Smith, M.D., M.P.H. Since its incorporation into the Department of Family Medicine in 2003, the Center has facilitated more than 224 School of Medicine and School of Nursing students in taking international health elective courses around the world.

Students increasingly cite the opportunities for global health training as a major reason for choosing the School of Medicine at UTMB. The center provides support for the student organization S.I.G.H.T. (Students Improving Global Health Together) and helps sponsor annual International Education Week activities, including a poster contest and a photography contest. Abraham Verghese, M.D., was a guest speaker for World Health Day activities in April 2006. In November 2006 the Center will host the first regional global health education conference at UTMB, with speakers from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Romania, and Nicaragua. In 2005 the Center launched HABLE,
Healing in a Bilingual Learning Environment, a track that integrates medical Spanish and culture into the first-year curriculum, with a long-term goal of producing more physicians competent to provide quality care to the increasing Hispanic population in Texas. The first group successfully completed their course in May 2006 and requested to continue it in their second year. A new HABLE first-year group started in August 2006.

Over the past three years, 41 students were awarded competitive Global Health Scholarships totaling $55,750 to assist with their travel to Africa, Romania, India, Thailand, China, the Philippines, Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. Funds have been provided by the Office of the Dean of Medicine and the McLaughlin Fund.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

The Complementary and Alternative Medicine initiative is thriving under the leadership of Victor Sierpina, M.D. Dr. Sierpina was awarded a five-year grant from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), a center within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 2000. This funding concluded in 2005 and integrates alternative-therapies teaching across all four years of the medical school curriculum, residency programs, allied health and nursing. As a result of this project educational resources and evidence-based online databases in alternative medicine are available to faculty, residents, and students.

In 2004 Dr. Sierpina received an award from the NIH’s National Institute on Aging as part of the R21 Exploratory and Development Grant Program. This project includes direct funding to investigate the psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) of stress and coping in older adults with a focus on Hispanic senior citizens by funding several pilot projects via the Mind-Body Research Scholar Program. The scholars program is designed to create an investigator-development program for faculty to foster interdisciplinary mind-body research through mentoring, training in research tools, techniques, and writing skills.

The Complementary and Alternative Medicine initiative has brought practitioners and scientists across disciplines together (e.g. a multidisciplinary journal club, collaborative research, and educational projects). It has increased awareness and resources related to alternative therapies. It continues to support curricular innovation related to alternative therapies and actively seeks to assist and increase clinical research on alternative therapies and mind-body medicine.
Residency

The Family Medicine Residency Program flourished in 2005 under the able leadership of Lisa Nash, D.O. The Residency Program currently has 28 resident trainees and has trained more than 250 physicians in its 35 years. The primary goal of the Residency Program is to prepare physicians for successful careers in family medicine, using an innovative curriculum grounded in the traditional precepts of family medicine: continuity of care, comprehensive care, longitudinal care, contextual and community-based care, and commitment to the patient. Program faculty continue to augment the curriculum in the areas of rural medicine, alternative and integrative medicine, international health, behavioral medicine, research, geriatrics, obstetrics, and cultural competency.

In 2004, Dr. Nash was awarded a Residency Training in Primary Care grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. As part of this grant, faculty are developing a curriculum based on video monitoring and evaluation of patient encounters conducted by residents. Emphasis is placed on cultural competency and six other core competencies. Previous grants funded by HRSA provided for the development of a Rural Training Track for the program, which provides specialized training for residents who seek to practice in under served or rural areas. Other projects include the development of an online resident portfolio and assessment system that meets the expectations of the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM). This project also corresponds with the Outcome Project initiative of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME).

The Research Program has been conducting sponsored clinical trials since 1999 under the leadership of Jamal Islam, M.D., M.S. The sponsored clinical trials are conducted in an outpatient setting and focus primarily on diabetes, hypertension, and men’s health issues. The group offers patients access to new treatments and cutting-edge medications with the goal of improving medical care and patient compliance. The group also collaborates with other UTMB departments in conducting clinical trials and actively seeks additional opportunities of collaboration.

Approximately 150 patients are currently involved in five studies conducted by the Sponsored Clinical Trials Group, with plans to increase enrollment to more than 200 by the end of 2007. In 2006 the group collaborated with sponsors such as Novartis, GlaxoSmithKline, Medpace, Southwest Oncology Group, the Sealy & Smith Foundation, and Sanofi and has successfully completed six trials.
The Family Medicine Research Program, directed by Alvah R. Cass, M.D., S.M., exceeded $1 million in funding in 2005, with federal funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). In 2005 the program was ranked second in Texas among family medicine departments receiving NIH awards. The program’s research interests include health promotion, chronic disease management, educational research, and complementary and alternative medicine. The program also supports resident research activities.

The Health Promotion Group focuses on early detection of disease and disease prevention. One focus area is racial/ethnic disparities in cancer screening. Navkiran Shokar, M.D., M.P.H., has been awarded a NIH National Cancer Institute grant for work in this area. Her work was previously funded by the John Sealy Memorial Endowment Fund for Biomedical Research (JSMEFBR), the Joint AAFP Foundation-AAFP Grant Awards Program (JGAP) and the American Cancer Society. Another current research area is the early detection of osteoporosis, which has been funded by JGAP.

The Chronic Disease Management Group focuses on diabetes mellitus. Research projects conducted by this group have been awarded more than $250,000 in funding from the National Science Foundation and the JGAP.

The Educational Research Group largely focuses on distance education and learning styles. In collaboration with the Predoctoral Program, Residency Program, and Complementary and Alternative Medicine Project, this group has been awarded multiple grants from HRSA.

The Complementary and Alternative Medicine Group focuses on mind-body research and patient utilization, which has been funded by the NIH, the JSMEFBR and the Texas Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.
The Department of Family Medicine currently operates three clinical practices: the Family Medicine Clinic, the UTMB Urgent Care Clinic, and the Family Medicine Inpatient Service at John Sealy Hospital. In addition, Family Medicine faculty and residents treat patients through the nursing home practice at the Edgewater Retirement Community and the Teen Health Clinic at Ball High School in Galveston, Texas. Jennifer R. Raley, M.D., is the medical director of the Family Medicine Clinic and Urgent Care Clinic, and Syed Azhar, M.D., M.B.A., is the medical director of the Family Medicine Inpatient Service.

The Family Medicine Clinic is a primary care practice providing community-based, family-centered clinical care to the people of Galveston County and Texas. A small team-based approach facilitates providing patient-centered care to patients based on their needs. Among the teams are a team of Spanish-speaking physicians, a team integrating alternative medicine therapies into their practice, and a team focusing on continuity of care. The clinic has a total of 20 faculty physicians and 28 resident physicians supported by 12 nurses and other health care workers, including two physician assistants, a social worker and two family therapists who record approximately 30,000 visits to family medicine patients.

The Urgent Care Clinic provides walk-in primary care services to patients of all ages and records approximately 10,000 visits per year. The Family Medicine Inpatient Service is primarily a teaching service.

Our physician assistants, Susan Berkley and Debra Kimmey, are important members of our clinical team. They support our physicians and clinic staff in keeping our clinic running on time. PA’s assist in seeing patients in both Family Medicine and Urgent Care clinics, completing admissions, and handling complex phone calls. Susan Berkley assists with our Teen Health Clinic and Debra assists with nursing home visit organization and patient care.
The department’s support staff are essential to our success. They provide the professional and operational support needed for the faculty to effectively fulfill the department’s mission. The 32-member staff boasts a wide variety of skills, talents, and knowledge, including specialized skills in clinical research, medical coding and billing, computer programming, financial management, grants management, and administrative management and support. While some members of the staff are new to the department, many others have been supporting the Family Medicine mission for more than 20 years.

The department has taken an active role in developing its staff, providing continuing education opportunities and launching an Employee Wellness Project in 2005. As part of that project, a total of 30 staff attended two Mind-Body Skills Workshops over six and eight-week periods. Department leaders are committed to enhancing our knowledge and appreciation of our diverse workforce, and so hosted its first annual Diversity Luncheon in 2006 to celebrate the diversity among our faculty, residents, and staff.

There are many examples of how our staff have contributed to the university community. Diedra Walters serves as a member of the university’s Diversity Council, and Angela Wells serves as a member of the Clinical Diversity Council. In 2006 the staff team “Family and Friends for Life” won a newcomer award for their participation and fundraising achievements for the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life. Nineteen staff members walked in the Relay for Life, and many others helped raise funds through donations, bake sales, hamburger lunches, and a silent auction. Staff members also participate annually in other philanthropic endeavors, such as Santa Saints, a program to benefit patients’ families who are in need.