

UT Southwestern's Hobbs elected to National Academy of Sciences

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DALLAS – May 1, 2007 – The National Academy of Sciences today elected Dr. Helen Hobbs, director of the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development at UT Southwestern Medical Center and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator, to membership. With her election, UT Southwestern now has 17 faculty members currently serving in the esteemed organization.

One other Texas researcher – Dr. Mary K. Estes from the Department of Molecular Virology and Microbiology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston – was among the 72 new members and 18 foreign associates who were elected today to the NAS. There are now 23 NAS members at Texas academic medical institutions. More than 70 percent of those are at UT Southwestern.

“This recognition from the National Academy of Sciences is a wonderful surprise,” said Dr. Hobbs, who also is a member of the National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine, to which she was elected in 2004. “I owe tremendous gratitude to my colleagues and lab personnel who have provided support to my research, as well as to my mentors and to the institution for providing such an intellectually stimulating environment.

“I want to thank especially Dr. Donald Seldin [former chairman of internal medicine at UT Southwestern] who single-handedly changed the course of my career, and Drs. Michael Brown and Joseph Goldstein, who provided a tough, rigorous and yet supportive environment in which to train as a scientist.”

Dr. Hobbs’ research focuses on identifying genetic factors that contribute to variations in the levels of cholesterol in the blood, especially LDL cholesterol. High levels of LDL cholesterol in the blood increase the risk of a heart attack.

“Helen Hobbs is as dynamic, energetic and creative a physician-scientist as one could imagine,” said Dr. Alfred Gilman, provost, executive vice president for academic affairs and dean of UT Southwestern Medical School. “Her research reveals truly important knowledge of how our genes interact with our lifestyle and contribute to cardiovascular disease. Her election to the National Academy of Sciences is proper recognition of her extraordinary talents.”

Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern, said, “Helen is not only an extraordinary scientist but also a wonderful institutional citizen at UT Southwestern. Her commitment to advancing medical knowledge and her creative leadership in many important initiatives, locally and nationally, is exceptional.”

Dr. Hobbs, a UT Southwestern faculty member for 20 years, earned her medical degree from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and completed an internship in internal medicine at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. She moved to Dallas in 1980 and was chief resident in internal medicine at Parkland Memorial Hospital. Dr. Hobbs made the transition from full-time clinician to physician-scientist at the urging of her mentors, Dr. Brown, director of the Erik Jonsson Center for Research in Molecular Genetics and Human Disease, and Dr. Goldstein, chairman of molecular genetics, at UT Southwestern. Beginning in 1983, Dr. Hobbs spent four years as a postdoctoral research fellow in their laboratory before joining the UT Southwestern faculty. Drs. Brown and

Goldstein earned a Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1985 for their discovery of the tiny, complex molecules called receptors that recognize and bind to low-density lipoprotein cholesterol.

“Helen Hobbs is the world’s leading geneticist in the arena of cholesterol metabolism and heart attacks,” Dr. Brown said. “With generous assistance from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, Helen and her collaborator, Dr. Jonathan Cohen, discovered how certain genes predispose people to heart attacks and others protect. These discoveries help to estimate genetic risk for each individual, and they also point pharmaceutical companies to the proper targets for drug development. Her election to the National Academy was a slam dunk.”

Today, as director of the acclaimed Donald W. Reynolds Cardiovascular Clinical Research Center as well as the McDermott Center, Dr. Hobbs combines her clinical training with an intense research program in genetics to translate discoveries from the laboratory into practical ways to improve human health.

Supported by grants of more than \$50 million from the Reynolds Foundation since 1999, Dr. Hobbs and her colleagues in the Reynolds Center have the ambitious goal of developing a new paradigm for the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of heart disease. The centerpiece of that effort is the Dallas Heart Study, a long-term project examining the underlying risk factors for cardiovascular disease among the city’s multiethnic population.

In 2005 Dr. Hobbs was the first recipient of the Clinical Scientist Award from the American Heart Association for the work she has performed in the Dallas Heart Study. Also that year, she was awarded Germany’s highly respected Heinrich Wieland Prize for her research on lipids, the fifth faculty member from UT Southwestern to receive the honor.

Dr. Hobbs holds the Eugene McDermott Distinguished Chair for the Study of Human Growth and Development and the Dallas Heart Ball Chair in Cardiology Research.

The election of new NAS members was announced during the 144th annual meeting of the academy in Washington, D.C. The NAS is a private, nonprofit society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific and engineering research.

Other UT Southwestern faculty who are members of the NAS and the year they were appointed are: Ronald W. Estabrook, Ph.D., 1979; Michael S. Brown, M.D., 1980; Joseph L. Goldstein, M.D., 1980; Jean D. Wilson, M.D., 1983; Jonathan W. Uhr, M.D., 1984; Alfred G. Gilman, M.D., Ph.D., 1985; Roger H. Unger, M.D., 1986; Steven L. McKnight, Ph.D., 1992; Ellen S. Vitetta, Ph.D., 1994; Johann Deisenhofer, Ph.D., 1997; Eric N. Olson, Ph.D., 2000; Thomas C. Südhof, M.D., 2002; Masashi Yanagisawa, M.D., Ph.D., 2003; Xiaodong Wang, Ph.D., 2004; Dr. Melanie Cobb, Ph.D., 2006; and David Russell, Ph.D., 2006.

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