

UT Southwestern Medical Center

Addressing the National Opioid Abuse Epidemic

December 3, 2018

To the UT Southwestern Community:

Yesterday the *Dallas Morning News* published an article that highlighted the accidental deaths of two of our nursing colleagues over the past two years due to opioid overdoses, losses that our caregiver community still mourns. Tragically, our country is confronting an epidemic of opioid misuse that is affecting health care systems nationwide. As we endeavor to provide the very best health care possible and support our physicians, nurses, and other caregivers who serve our patients with the utmost dedication, I want to share with you how we are responding to this national crisis.

First, let me emphasize that the well-being of our patients is always our highest priority. We will swiftly intervene to ensure their safety whenever we have reason to suspect a caregiver is impaired.

We also recognize that it is essential to have effective policies and procedures in place. As an academic medical center with a commitment to constant learning, we are continuously seeking new ways to maintain the highest standards and utilize best available practices in the handling and use of controlled substances.

Unfortunately, there is no single solution to the potential diversion of controlled substances in the hospital setting, and accordingly we employ multiple approaches to minimize this possibility. In addition to many physical and procedural controls, we closely review data on use of controlled substances to identify any deviations from appropriate utilization for further investigation.

The potential for substance abuse by caregivers has been well-recognized as a problem nationally, and we will continue to do all we can to address that potential at UT Southwestern. We have endeavored to combat the stigma of addiction and encouraged voluntary disclosure of those affected. We also offer our caregivers programs to help get them on the road to personal and professional recovery.

Looking ahead, we will continue to identify and implement additional tools that might enhance our ability to track medications and drug disposals, as well as improve our analytics. We will also enhance our educational programs to improve awareness and recognition of substance abuse.

Central to all these efforts is our commitment to the welfare of our patients as our most important priority. We are extremely fortunate to have outstanding, dedicated physicians, nurses, and other practitioners committed to excellence in the care we deliver. We recognize that to provide that excellence, it is essential that we support the health and well-being of all who deliver care to our patients – including reaching out with compassion to those among us who need assistance battling addiction and its tragic impact.

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