



## Message from Dr. Sachs:

### *The Class of 2009 graduates from TUSOM with pride*

On behalf of Tulane School of Medicine, it is with great pride that I offer congratulations to the Class of 2009. Graduating from medical school is always a tremendous accomplishment but in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Class of 2009 demonstrated a flexibility and resilience unlike that of other graduating classes.

When Hurricane Katrina struck in the fall of 2005, TUSOM students were getting settled into the routine of first year medical school. Forced from their residences in the wake of the storm, TUSOM students regrouped in Houston to resume classes. They had another delay with the threat of Hurricane Rita, which was predicted to make landfall near Houston. Fortunately, Rita was a near miss.

In Houston, Baylor College of Medicine generously opened their doors and provided TUSOM the opportunity to maintain operations during a crucial time in the school's history. Our students focused on their education, as well as maintaining the best sense of normalcy possible. Many students had lost their homes, cars, and their way of life in New Orleans. Their ability to focus on their education was amazing to witness, as was their desire to return to New Orleans.

Upon TUSOM's return to New Orleans, the students demonstrated their commitment with the school's mission of "Education, Research, and Patient Care: We Heal Communities." The desire to make in a difference in post-Katrina New Orleans is evident in our student's activities and projects. From a student-run free health care clinic to a healthy-living project in rural Louisiana, students volunteered more than 9,500 hours of service annually.

As the Class of 2009 moves on, we are excited to welcome the Class of 2013 this fall. From more than 9,200 applications, TUSOM will welcome first year medical students at White Coat Day on Monday, August 3, 2009.

In this issue of the Dean's Update, you will read about our new Office of Community Affairs and Health Policy. Dr. Douglas Slakey provides an update from the Department of Surgery, and Dr. Kevin Krane details the new DeBakey Education Center. Earlier this month, we opened a new high school health clinic at Walter Cohen High School. Finally, one of our surgeons who serves in the U.S. Army Reserves is profiled. By the time this newsletter reaches your mailbox, Dr. Mary Jo Wright will be back on American soil.

In previous newsletters, I have talked about the city of New Orleans as it continues to rebuild post-Katrina. I continue to witness our medical school attracting not only some of the best and brightest young people that want to become physicians but also those who have a strong commitment to public service. Tulane University School of Medicine has become a magnet for young people that are attracted to the study of medicine and who want to make a difference in our community.

Regards,

Ben

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## Tulane Surgeon Provides Vital Care in Iraq

By Dr. Edward Newsome, Jr.

As a Lieutenant Colonel and chief of professional services for the U.S Army Reserve's 945th Forward Surgical Team (FST), Dr. Mary Jo Wright used her passion for surgery to provide first rate patient care in the field. Deployed to Iraq in early 2009, Dr. Wright and her unit were tasked with performing life-saving limb and eye sight surgery. The FST included three general surgeons, one orthopedist, two CRNAs, three RNS, three LPNs, three EMTs and one member of the medical services corps (non-medical role). A helicopter unit flew casualties in to the medical team, and out to a higher level of care when needed.

The FST was located in a very rural area with primitive conditions. The team lived and worked in tents, and existed without running water. Two hot meals were served at breakfast and dinner, with MREs (meals ready to eat) available for lunch. Internet access was limited, the phone system was inconsistent, and on-the-ground communications were by radio. But even with those challenges, Dr. Wright was committed to the mission at hand.

"I joined the reserves because I thought that if there was ever another war, as a surgeon I needed to do my part to take care of the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces. It has been a very rewarding ride," said Dr. Wright.

During her first tour in Iraq from 2002-2003, Dr. Wright served as the First Forward Surgical Team Commander and was awarded the Bronze Star. Upon her return, Dr. Wright returned to Tulane where she resumed her work on the trauma team. In 2005, she decided to pursue her desire to better understand and provide first class treatment of surgical disease of the breast. Dr. Wright then enrolled in a breast fellow-

ship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

"Until my experience at Memorial Sloan-Kettering, I had never contemplated the reconstructive side of plastic surgery, and certainly not reconstructive oncology surgery. As the rotation progressed, I found a renewed sense of enthusiasm and the yearning to do and know more about reconstructive surgery," said Wright. "It seemed to consist of all the elements I respect about surgery: the inclusion of vascular surgery to the reconstruction, taking a complex problem and thinking outside the box to solve it, and being able to make someone whole again."

After her fellowship, Dr. Wright returned to New Orleans and Tulane School of Medicine, assisting Dr. Steve Jones with the development of a state-of-the-art breast program at Tulane-Lakeside Hospital in Metairie.

Dr. Edward Newsome, Program Director and Chief of Plastic Surgery at Tulane, says "Dr. Wright is one of the most passionate physicians I have ever worked with. She goes the extra mile for her patients and accepts nothing less than the best possible patient care."

Dr. Wright completed her undergraduate studies at Vanderbilt University, followed by medical school at St. Louis University School of Medicine. In 1998, she joined the Tulane Department of



"As a surgeon, I needed to do my part to take care of the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces..."

Surgery faculty where she was part of the trauma team at Charity Hospital, directly assisting in the care of a trauma load of more than 4,000 patients per year.

With her passion for continued learning, Dr. Wright applied for and was accepted into the Tulane plastic surgery training program which she will start upon her return from Iraq. Dr. Wright is excited about this new opportunity.

"I cannot think of a better fit for me and for my practice than to combine cancer surgery with the restorative conclusion," said Wright. "I would like to assist women in rebuilding their lives both physically and mentally by offering comprehensive therapy meeting high oncologic and aesthetic goals. I realize this embodies the essence of plastic surgery."



Members of the Dean's Office at Tulane School of Medicine sent a care package to Dr. Wright and her comrades in March 2009.

L to R:

Julie Acosta, Rhonda Barre, Kathryn Pierce, and Tanya Haase.  
Photo: Annemarie Haydel

## CHAIR'S COLUMN: Dr. Douglas Slakey, MD, Chair, Dept. of Surgery

As the Department of Surgery begins its 175th year, we are experiencing growth and implementing new initiatives in each area of our academic mission. During the past three years, surgery has recruited 13 new full time faculty who have relocated to Tulane and New Orleans from around the country. They have brought enthusiasm for excellence and determination to promote academic surgery.

The pursuit of clinical excellence has resulted in focused growth in several areas. For example, we established the first academic endocrine surgery section in the region. Advancements in endocrine surgery at Tulane include minimally invasive surgical approaches to thyroid and parathyroid disease and robotic adrenalectomy. The advancement of minimally invasive surgery is a major initiative of the Department. We have several active minimally invasive programs advancing care of the surgical patient, including laparoscopic living donor nephrectomy, metabolic surgery (for obesity), robotic colon resection, liver and pancreas resection, and hernia repair. In addition, Tulane surgeons are developing the newest surgery technique called NOTES (natural orifice transluminal endoscopic surgery) in cooperation with gastroenterology.

Cooperation with colleagues in other departments has become an essential part of Tulane Surgery. We have established multidisciplinary care teams with gastroenterology, hepatology, nephrology, endocrinology, oncology, pediatrics, and ENT. The multidisciplinary approach to patient care ensures that patients receive the most rapid, comprehensive and advanced care. By placing teams in shared clinics, patients can be seen and evaluated by

medicine and surgery specialists simultaneously, a great advantage.

To ensure excellence in surgical outcomes, the Department and the hospital have begun participating in the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (NSQIP). NSQIP is the premier surgical safety initiative in the United States, and places Tulane surgery amongst the elite surgery departments nationwide. In fact, Tulane is the first academic surgery program in Louisiana to take this important step promoting patient safety and excellence in surgical outcomes.

Education has taken a step forward with the creation of the Division of Surgical Education. This new division has responsibility for coordinating and promoting surgery education for students, residents and practicing physicians through CME events. Applying advanced educational techniques, including technical trainers and realistic surgical simulation, our residents have increased the average in-service test score 90% during the past three years. The reputation for excellence encouraged more than 600 resident applicants from across the country this year, and matched three excellent candidates. There has also been growth in our fellowship programs. Tulane now has a fellowship in endocrine and minimally invasive surgery, and we plan to begin a transplant surgery fellowship next year.

Given the success of the Department's clinical and educational programs, it is not a surprise that surgery research has witnessed resurgence in productivity. Surgery faculty have many advanced clinical studies such as an NIH-funded study of solid organ transplantation in patients who are HIV positive. Surgical basic science studies are

exploring hyperbaric storage of organs for transplant (extending storage time and improving function), the use of adult stem cells to promote cosmetically acceptable healing after trauma, burns, and major surgical resections for cancer, improving life-saving resuscitation after trauma, and new approaches to the treatment of breast cancer. The success of surgical research has resulted in more than 80 presentations at national and international meeting during the past 12 months.

The Surgery Department vision is to promote excellence in academic surgery. The Department recognizes the importance of surgical care, education and science in ensuring Tulane's position as an outstanding medical center. Please visit our new website, <http://surgery.tulane.edu>, to keep up with Surgery events and initiatives.

### TUSOM Quick Facts Match 2009

- Tulane School of Medicine students were placed in 28 states, including New York (ten students), Massachusetts (nine students) and California (nine students)
- 23% are staying in Louisiana
- 39% selected Primary Care
- The three top specialties for Tulane School of Medicine students include:
  - Internal Medicine
  - Orthopedics
  - Pediatrics

# Office of Community Affairs and Health Policy Takes Lead with Community Initiatives

by Leah Berger, MPH,  
Director of Community Health Programs, Planning & Development

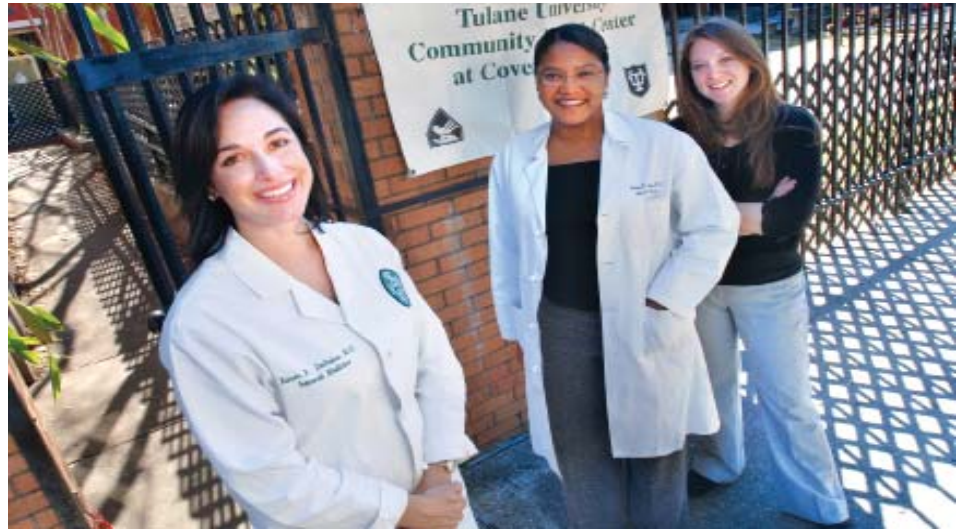
Since Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, Tulane University School of Medicine has been at the forefront of the movement to rebuild a health system that provides all New Orleans residents access to high quality, neighborhood-based primary care. Our faculty, residents and students are involved in numerous community programs serving the most vulnerable populations throughout the city. To date, we have served 70,000 patients since Hurricane Katrina.

Building upon these experiences in the immediate post-hurricane period, TUSOM changed its mission to "Education, Research and Patient Care: We Heal Communities." In January 2008, this mission was strengthened with the creation of the Office of Community Affairs and Health Policy (OCAHP) and the appointment of Karen B. DeSalvo, MD, MPH, MSc, as Vice Dean for Community Affairs and Health Policy.

The goals of OCAHP are to:

- Coordinate TUSOM's activities in community health
- Increase access to neighborhood-based health by connecting existing health resources
- Develop new comprehensive, neighborhood health centers
- Foster education and workforce development for health professionals
- Influence health policy around community health at the local, state and national level

Over the past year, OCAHP developed a vision for neighborhood health ([http://cahp.tulane.edu/pdfs/comm\\_health\\_re\\_08.pdf](http://cahp.tulane.edu/pdfs/comm_health_re_08.pdf)) and through a rigorous process, identified five target New



L to R: Dr. Karen DeSalvo, Dr. Eboni Price, and Leah Berger

Orleans neighborhoods where the program would have the most impact. Criteria included neighborhood leadership, need for services, Tulane's involvement with other schools or departments, and feasibility for success. Based upon the criteria, Tulane committed to increasing access to care in the following areas: New Orleans East, Central City, Broadmoor, Gentilly, and Treme/Lafitte.

"It is not our intent to own numerous health centers – we recognize that for these centers to be successful and sustainable, it is important that the community take ownership," said DeSalvo. "They then can be most reflective of and responsive to the community."

Development of comprehensive centers for three neighborhoods is currently underway, with all sites expected to be fully operational by 2010. In the interim, medical services continue through TUSOM's three mobile medical units, Adolescent Drop-in Center, Community Pediatrics clinic, and the Community Health Centers at Covenant House and New Orleans East. Recently, five of our clinics

received national recognition for quality as Patient-Centered Medical Homes by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).

OCAHP has also been engaged in offering health training and educational programs, including hosting students and working with School of Public Health students to complete their capstone projects. A School Health Collaborative has been formed to coordinate cross-departmental school health programs. Externally-funded research programs in doctor-patient communication, quality and community-based mental health are underway, supporting OCAHP's efforts to innovate community health to provide the most patient- and community-centered quality care possible. Vice Dean DeSalvo has also been actively engaged in leading advocacy and policy efforts aimed at expanding and sustaining advances in community health in New Orleans.

To learn more about the Office of Community Affairs and Health Policy, please visit [cahp.tulane.edu](http://cahp.tulane.edu) or call 504-988-4016.

# Enhancing the Educational Experience: Tulane's Futuristic View

by Dr. Kevin Krane, MD

Staying a step ahead of the curve is always a challenge in medical education, and several initiatives are aimed at keeping Tulane School of Medicine on that track. While the traditional lecture is an important part of medical education, modern educational training emphasizes active learning methods that can substitute for this method. To enhance our resources to do so, the current T-1's will soon be moving into the new 2nd floor Murphy building space which will be named the DeBakey Educational Center.

This futuristic facility, large enough to hold up to 200 students (but able to be divided into two half-classes), contains the latest in multi-media presentation equipment and sound, is filled with tables of six and is surrounded by 15, sixty-five inch LCD flat screens, and two large Smartboards™. The room is designed to facilitate both Team-Based Learning (TBL) and Just in Time Teaching (JiTT). This year, we initiated our first TBL sessions and while the overall experience was very positive, we are building on what we have learned.

JiTT involves a blend of active learning strategies with web-based technology, and similar to TBL, students must complete reading assignments on which they are tested. However, the instructor uses feedback on the material to determine as what topics need to be covered in class. The in-class component can enhance student learning, rather than simply covering the points that the students already understand after reading the material or mastering it on their own.

The opening of Tulane's Center for Advanced Simulation and Team Training has created additional opportunities for active learning. While the Center is already being used by students to learn both basic and more advanced clinical skills, faculty are working together across disciplines to determine how the use of simulation can demonstrate and reinforce the application of basic science education in clinical medicine, something done by clinicians every day. While not finalized, these types of learning opportunities are already being planned in gross anatomy and

in cardiovascular and pulmonary physiology and pathophysiology.

In addition, the pilot program Tulane's Scholarly Project is being finalized. This program will allow a select number of incoming first year students the opportunity to volunteer for a longitudinal, mentored program that will result in the completion of a scholarly product by their fourth year. The Scholarly Project program will serve as the basis for stimulating more students to engage and take advantage of both basic and clinical research opportunities.

Tulane remains engaged in enhanced curricular activities in several other ways. The school hosted the Southern Group on Educational Affairs annual meeting in early April. Representing over 40 medical schools, this successful meeting showcased Tulane and New Orleans and featured a number of presentations by both our faculty and students. Next year Tulane has been asked to host the annual TBL Collaborative Meeting, and co-host the International Association of Medical Educators meeting.

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## TU Health Sciences Center Presents Teaching Scholar Awards

Congratulations to

Dr. Norman E. McSwain, Jr., MD, FACS

*Recipient*

and

Dr. Elma I. LeDoux, MD, FACC

*Finalist*

of the 2009 Teaching Scholar Awards

May 7, 2009



# TUSOM Opens Health Clinic at Walter L. Cohen High School

by Keith Brannon, Assistant Director, Office of Public Relations

If students at Walter L. Cohen High School get a fever or sprain an ankle, they won't have to travel much farther than down the hall to see a doctor or nurse practitioner. Tulane University School of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics and the Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD) opened the Walter L. Cohen School-Based Health Center to provide high quality medical and behavioral health services to high school students without regard to their ability to pay.

The clinic's grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony was Tuesday, May 12 at Cohen High School, located at 3520 Dryades St. in New Orleans.

The center, located within the school, has four clinic exam rooms, a mental health counseling area, laboratory and an administrative office. It will offer annual physical exams, sports physicals, immunization shots, hearing and vision screening, nutrition counseling, health education as well as general primary care services for treating minor illnesses and injuries. The clinic also will offer behavioral health

services, including individual, group and family counseling.

"School-based health centers offer the school community access to preventive healthcare services. Most often, adolescents do not receive routine preventive health care even when it is available to them in other settings," says Dr. Sue Ellen Abdalian, medical director for the center. "This clinic can provide a medical home for students in a safe, approachable environment so they won't have to miss school and their parents will not have to miss work for every needed healthcare visit."

RSD Superintendent Paul Vallas said the clinic will provide a crucial service to Cohen's students by helping to identify and address health issues and problems that might interfere with the learning process. "The help our students need will be readily available where they need it, and I have no doubt that it will help address previously unmet medical needs and help our students stay in school. I applaud Tulane University for increasing access to health care for our

students and thank all those who have worked to make this clinic a reality."

The center, which will be open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, will treat patients with or without health insurance. Summer hours will coincide with summer school. The clinic's staff will include a doctor, nurse practitioner, medical office assistant, social worker and nurse.

Although Tulane University has helped open and has a presence in many other school-based health centers, the Cohen Health Center is the first Tulane-sponsored school-based health center. The center is funded through the Louisiana Public Health Institute's Primary Care Access And Stabilization Grant program. The Louisiana Public Health Institute, through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson and W.K. Kellogg foundations, also supplied the center's electronic medical records system. School Health Connection, a regional collaborative group formed to support school-based health centers in the New Orleans area, provided additional support for student and community health advocacy.

Cohen High School has a health careers focus. Teachers at Cohen's Academy of Health Sciences plan to use the Health Center as an educational resource and role model for students hoping to pursue careers in health care. Students enrolled in the Academy program prepare for future careers in health care by graduating with certification and endorsements in pre-medical training, nursing, sports medicine, nutrition or first responder/emergency medical services.



L to R, clockwise: Dr. Sue Abdalian and Cohen students Ciara Jones, Keaton Anthony Williams, and Lasha Bourgeois. Photo: Sally Asher