Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the president, Dr. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, at 12:09 PM on September 13, 2010, in the Coleman building, Room A101.

Attendance

The following members were present:

Louisa Balazs, MD, PhD, Martin A. Croce, MD, Maggie DeBon, PhD, Denis DiAngelo, PhD, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, PhD, Bob Foehring, PhD, Haavi Morreim, PhD, William R. Morris, MD, Linda K. Myers, MD, A.P. Naren, PhD, Edwards Park, PhD, Thad Wilson, PhD, Richard Nollan, MLS, MA

The following guest(s) was (were) present:

Approval of minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written. Minutes had previously been distributed by electronic means.

Business

President Fitzpatrick began by proposing goals for the year. Since Chancellor Schwab wants UTHSC to be in the top quartile of research institutions, she suggested that it will be important for him to understand the most serious obstacles to research. She asked DFAC members to inquire with their respective department faculty to identify, with as much specificity as possible, what sorts of obstacles they encounter.

She noted that Material Transfer Agreements/MTAs are a significant problem for many people. Likewise, administrative burdens of compliance have increased while support staff are reduced, leaving less time for writing grants and carrying out research. Better data bases and better use of technology would likewise be helpful. A morale problem also has arisen, as faculty facing these problems sometimes feel that administration is not sufficiently aware of and concerned about these problems.

Further discussion among the DFAC agreed that MTAs are too often problematic. For instance, UTK lawyers say certain things can not be done at all, such as an MTA with a foreign country. Additionally, sometimes after a year or more of negotiations in which the lawyers refuse to sign an MTA, the original proposal eventually gets signed--triggering frustration among research faculty. Technical resources likewise are sometimes deficient, impeding certain kinds of research.
Some NIH institutions have standard MTAs, which apparently UT does not have.
The question arose whether perhaps UT might evaluate and possibly adopt a more standardized approach.

Dean Smith agreed that problems have arisen in this area. The UTK attorneys have apparently addressed the issues one at a time, and so UTHSC may need to take a more unified approach. State and federal law do pose intricacies that need to be addressed, however, and so the issue is not likely to be resolved in the imminent future.

Dr. Smith noted that a mass spectrometer is being purchased and, unlike labs that sometimes become the "property" of one individual, this is to be a core lab facility. Dean Smith encouraged DFAC to continue to place focus in these areas.

Another concern raised was that sometimes the campus seems to place too much emphasis on attracting or creating new projects and too little on supporting the research that is already here and ongoing.

One question then mentioned was whether core services should predominantly be housed in the UTHSC campus as a whole, under the vice-chancellor of research, or whether at least some core services should be specifically in the College of Medicine. One recent change has been that instead of simply providing equipment, UT now expects researchers to pay for equipment, including sometimes expensive repairs, out of their own budgets. Previously, new researchers were allowed at least to try a particular technology, to determine whether it is helpful to their research, before requiring an ongoing financial commitment. That option no longer appears to be available.

Another issue focuses on F&A/facilities and administration levies for institutional overhead. Although these funds are now completely controlled by UT, Dean Smith suggested that ultimately the best solution may be to return to a sharing arrangement in which researchers and departments have control over at least a portion of the funds, rather than all F&A funds being centrally controlled.

A further question concerned what sort of mentoring is provided for young researchers. The quality and quantity vary considerable from one department to the next. The CTSI grant will provide some funds for career development.

This week a formal presentation is being made to department chairs by Drs. Joan Chesney and Dianna Johnson, who are heading up this effort.

Dean Smith proposed that another question revolves around how to enhance team research, as distinct from the customary focus on individual researchers and their projects.

Dean Smith then provided an update on several issues.

Dr. Smith said the Pediatric Practice Plan is now officially up and running.

By January it will become a corporation, as it is now formally chartered.
Discussions with faculty will be undertaken to clear up assorted questions, including benefits.

He then updated the current status of searches. The search for the Executive Dean is now at the stage of identifying applicants, with interviews expected around November and the final name(s) to be forwarded to Knoxville in January. Tim Fabian is chair of the committee. Faculty will be consulted as the search moves forward.

The search for a Pediatrics chair is under way, and names are likely to be brought forward in the same time-frame as for the Executive Dean.

In Obstetrics/Gynecology the search is considerably farther along. Three final candidates are being brought in, and a decision will be made after the final visit.

Preventive Medicine has an interim chairman, and that search will be deferred so that we don't have too many chair searches under way at the same time. Likely whoever is the new Executive Dean will be directing that search.

For the new Vice-Chancellor of Research, the search committee is just now being formed. It will be advertised as a national search. One question will be whether to seek someone who has strong administrative background and skills, but perhaps is not a currently active research career, versus someone with a strong and active research agenda—which could occupy a significant portion of the person's attention and potentially pose competition with others' research.

Regarding refurbishing the first floor of the Coleman building and the basement of the 910 building, Dr. Smith said that insurance is helping to pay, and the renovations should proceed in the near future. The 920 building is currently under renovation, and psychiatry will be moving in shortly, along with facilities for training medical students in clinical skills.

Curricular revision is actively under way. By January the first round of changes should be clear as they apply to the first and second year students. It will involve more team-based learning, and will require recruiting a suitable clinical educator position.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the committee will be held on October 4, 2010, at 12:00 Noon in the Coleman building, Room A101.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

E. Haavi Morreim, JD, PhD
Secretary