

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler



A Custodian of Minds and Resources

Continuing a Tradition of Service to Education and Public Health



Jonathan MacClements MD, FAAP
Dr. and Mrs. Sam Topperman Professorship
in Medical Education

“There’s no greater joy than training young people with passion. I don’t feel like I’m working when I’m teaching.”

Throughout his decorated career, Dr. Jonathan MacClements has never wavered in his choice of vocation: to serve others as a doctor and a teacher. His dedication to his calling has resulted in award-winning work. Indeed, just this year, the British-born, South African-raised, and Texan-by-choice physician received a Regents Outstanding Teaching Award (ROTA) from The University of Texas System Board of Regents for his exemplary work at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler (UTHealth Northeast). “There is no greater joy than training young people who have such passion. It’s wonderful,” says Dr. MacClements. “I don’t feel like I’m working when I’m teaching.”

Dr. MacClements’ own sense of passion and his work ethic have served him well at UTHealth Northeast. He first came to the institution from South Africa for a residency in primary care. He then spent several years at the UT Medical Branch - Galveston, but came back to UTHealth Northeast when he joined the faculty as an assistant professor of family medicine. Today, Dr. MacClements is chairman of the family medicine department and is the dean of medical education. In addition to the ROTA he recently received, Dr. MacClements was awarded the Exemplary Teaching Award from the Texas Academy of Family Physicians in 2011.

Of his promotions and accomplishments, he is quick to salute those who have contributed to his success. “My wife, the community, the team of people that surround me—are all involved in training the next generation of physicians,” says Dr. MacClements. “We all stand on the shoulders of great men and women who came before us.”

One of those great men was Dr. Samuel Topperman, who, from 1952 until his retirement in 1970, served as the chief executive officer of the institution that would become UT Health Northeast. Dr. Topperman, a pediatric chest specialist, frequently traveled throughout Texas to build awareness about correctly diagnosing and treating tuberculosis (TB), which was still a prevalent illness in the state and a key focus area of the East Texas Chest Hospital, as UTHealth Northeast was known then.

It was only fitting, then, that the Board of Directors of the Health Science Center’s Medical Service Research and Development Plan would establish an endowed lectureship in Dr. Topperman’s name to honor him for his effectiveness as an educator and public health advocate. The fund was reclassified as the Dr. and Mrs. Sam Topperman Professorship in Medical Education in 1994.



Dr. Samuel Topperman served as the chief executive officer of the institution that would become UT Health Northeast.

Dr. MacClements now holds that professorship and is a responsible steward of the money that is distributed to him. “They’re not my funds; they are the funds of people who want to see medical education thrive and grow in Texas,” he asserts. “I feel that I am the custodian of resources that need to be used wisely and in the way that the benefactors intended.” Dr. MacClements, therefore, might use the money to ensure residents have access to training programs, or he may send a faculty member to a medical education conference. “I ensure that the funds are used globally across the education program after having asked: ‘How can this money benefit the faculty?’”

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Funds from the professorship are also used to improve educational opportunities on the UTHealth Northeast campus. "We bring in individuals who talk about professionalism," Dr. MacClements explains. "Once, a visitor from West Point discussed the military academy's honor code. I wanted learners to hear about the code because it exemplifies the value system we're trying to instill in our learners. We are in an honorable profession and we have to ensure that our own integrity is intact."

The Texas value system resonates with the MacClements family. When they arrived in the United States in 1996, Dr. MacClements and his wife were only supposed to have begun "a three-year adventure." Small-town, Texas-style hospitality charmed the couple, however; and they decided to stay. Their daughter, Victoria, was born in Texas in 1997. When Dr. MacClements became a citizen of the United States in 2005, she was on hand to witness what he has called "one of the proudest moments of my life."

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Dr. MacClements' devotion to Texas is not something he just talks about. In 2007, he volunteered to serve with the Texas State Guard Medical Brigade, a group of health care professionals and medical support personnel who assists during public health emergencies. He also participates in Operation Lonestar, a humanitarian medical mission that takes place along the Texas-Mexico border. Now the commanding officer of the Texas State Guard for his region, Dr. MacClements finds yet another reason for celebrating his choice of state: the willingness of people to put aside differences and rally together to take care of community. "It's wonderful to provide care to those who sorely need it. I'm blessed to be surrounded by wonderful people who love to serve others, too."



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