PRESIDENT'S LECTURE SERIES

Saad B. Omer, M.B.B.S., M.P.H., Ph.D.

Leveraging UT Southwestern's Academic Excellence for Public Health Impact

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025
4 p.m. Lecture, Reception to Follow
Tom and Lula Gooch Auditorium
utsouthwestern.edu/pls

UT Southwestern Medical Center

ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S LECTURE SERIES

The President's Lecture Series was established to recognize the importance of UT Southwestern staff in enabling the Medical Center to achieve its mission and goals. The faculty excels in education, research, and patient care only with the contributions of staff, whose work, directly and indirectly, supports faculty endeavors.

The lectures selected for this series provide an opportunity for the employees of UT Southwestern to learn more about the research discoveries, clinical advances, and other contributions of the Medical Center's most accomplished scientists, physicians, and senior leaders. Three times each academic year, leading experts present a President's Lecture, discussing in nontechnical terms the basics of their research and clinical programs and their implications for good health and medical care.

The President's Lecture Series is offered in appreciation and respect for the work and dedication of UT Southwestern staff.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.
President
UT Southwestern Medical Center

ABOUT THE LECTURE

In 2023, Saad B. Omer, M.B.B.S., M.P.H., Ph.D., became the founding Dean of UT Southwestern's Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health (OSPH), bringing a bold vision to elevate public health locally and globally. Guided by his lifelong commitment to scientific rigor and equity, Dr. Omer has shaped OSPH into a dynamic institution focused on meaningful public health research and transformative education.

Under his leadership and with the support of the faculty, the school has established four academic departments: Epidemiology; Health Data Science and Biostatistics; Health Economics, Systems and Policy; and Social and Behavioral Sciences. This has created a strong foundation for interdisciplinary research and collaboration among more than 70 primary and more than 60 secondary faculty members.

The school welcomed its first cohort of students in 2023 and celebrated its inaugural commencement in May 2025. Today OSPH offers a range of degree programs, including Master of Public Health (M.P.H.), M.D./M.P.H., Ph.D., Master of Science in Clinical Investigation, and Master of Science in Health Informatics, as well as multiple certificate programs. These offerings reflect OSPH's deep commitment to preparing the next generation of public health leaders to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving global health landscape.

Mentorship is at the heart of Dr. Omer's philosophy, and as the academic programs expand, so does the focus on creating a supportive and enriching learning environment. His belief in empowering students to dream boldly and think independently is reflected in the creation of the Instructional Excellence Unit, which supports faculty in delivering high-impact teaching and transformative learning experiences.

Looking ahead, Dr. Omer envisions public health as a hopeful vocation that shines a light on the interconnectedness of people and the commonalities uniting them. He is grateful for UT Southwestern and its community of supporters, whose investments are strengthening health in North Texas and beyond.

"There is no shortage of meaning in public health because it is the art of the possible," he said. "It's about seeing the glass as 20% full rather than 80% empty. Public health is about filling that glass."

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Saad B. Omer, M.B.B.S., M.P.H., Ph.D., is an internationally recognized epidemiologist known for his evidence-based approaches to tackle community health problems and improve lives. He serves as Dean of the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health.

Dr. Omer, who holds the Lyda Hill Deanship of the School of Public Health, has studied the epidemiology of respiratory viruses and worked on clinical trials to estimate the efficacy of maternal and/or infant vaccines. He also has helped evaluate drug regimens to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV and conducted several studies on interventions to increase immunization coverage.

His work has included public health preparedness strategies to effectively respond to large emerging and reemerging infectious disease outbreaks. Cited in global and country-specific policies, his recommendations have informed clinical practice and health legislation in several countries. Dr. Omer has published widely in peer-reviewed journals, including the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, *The Lancet*, *Cell*, *Science*, and *Nature*. He also has written op-eds for publications such as *The New York Times*, *Politico*, and *The Washington Post*.

Among his honors, Dr. Omer received the Maurice R. Hilleman Early-Stage Career Investigator Award from the National Foundation of Infectious Diseases for his work on maternal immunization. He is a member of the World Health Organization Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunization and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance Board. He also is a Fellow of the Infectious Diseases Society of America and, in 2022, was elected to the National Academy of Medicine.

Dr. Omer previously served as the inaugural Director of the Yale Institute for Global Health and Professor of Medicine at Yale School of Medicine. He received his medical degree from The Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan, and his M.P.H. and Ph.D. in global disease epidemiology and control from Johns Hopkins University.

ABOUT THE NEXT SPEAKER

Thursday, Feb. 26, 2026

Elizabeth Chen, Ph.D., Professor of Molecular Biology, has had a long-standing interest in cell-cell fusion, which is essential for fertilization, skeletal muscle development, bone resorption, immune response, placental formation, and stem cell-mediated tissue regeneration. Understanding the underlying mechanisms of cell-cell fusion could ultimately aid in the development of new therapies for various diseases, including congenital myopathies, cancer, and immune disorders.

Dr. Chen's lab has discovered the asymmetric fusogenic synapse as a conserved and general cellular structure mediating muscle cell fusion in flies, zebrafish, and mice, as well as the fusion of nonmuscle cells. Using a multi-faceted approach including genetics, cell biology, biochemistry, and biophysics, her lab has also uncovered novel mechanisms underlying actin dynamics, actin bundling, invasive protrusion formation, and mechanobiology.

Dr. Chen and her research team have established a new conceptual framework for cell-cell fusion and advanced our understanding of this important cellular process in the development, regeneration, and physiology of multicellular organisms.

Her honors include the WICB Mid-Career Award for Excellence in Research from the American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB) and the National Established Investigator Award from the American Heart Association. In addition, she was a Searle Scholar, a David and Lucile Packard Fellow, and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Faculty Scholar. She was elected as an ASCB Fellow in 2022 and as ASCB President for 2027.

Dr. Chen received her undergraduate degree in biology from Peking University and her Ph.D. in developmental biology from Stanford University. She was a Helen Hay Whitney postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Eric Olson, Ph.D., Chair of Molecular Biology at UTSW, where she initiated her independent project investigating the mechanisms underlying cell-cell fusion. Also a Professor of Cell Biology, Dr. Chen is a member of both the Hamon Center for Regenerative Science and Medicine and the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center.