

MED SCHOOL MISSION

*How TMA gives academic
physicians a voice and
a path to progress*



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Pediatrics

**University of Texas at Tyler School of Medicine
Tyler**

MEMBER SINCE 2022

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As the inaugural dean of UT Tyler School of Medicine, **Brigham C. Willis, MD**, is laser focused on a mission to address the shortage of physicians and lack of access to health care in East Texas, while improving the quality of life and health for the people living in the region.

Dr. Willis began his career as an academic physician at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas and left Texas for Arizona in 2007. As a Texan once again, one of Dr. Willis' first actions was to join TMA, becoming a member in February 2022. "I think it's really important to have the voice of academic faculty represented within organizations that represent physicians," he said.

ADVANCING ACCESS TO CARE

As a member of TMA's Council on Medical Education, Dr. Willis hasn't wasted any time engaging in advocacy. The new medical school has limited health care resources to support pediatric education. A pediatrician by training, Dr. Willis realizes he can't tackle this challenge alone.

"The council is a good forum for talking to multiple institutions about providing educational experience for our students so the medical school can continue to grow. [The council] allowed us to work on advancing that. You can't have a medical school without pediatrics," he explained. "Such partnership has already borne fruit, with regional partners in East Texas coming together to provide the pediatrics education necessary for the school to succeed."

Despite this success, more work is needed. East Texas' lack of access to tertiary, advanced pediatric care hits home for Dr. Willis, whose 9-year-old daughter requires major surgery for pectus excavatum (abnormal rib cage development). Like other families in the region with children in need of complex medical care, Dr. Willis and his family must travel to Dallas or Houston to get it.

"TMA can help physicians advance initiatives to advocate support for greater access to care," Dr. Willis said.

HAVING A VOICE

During his short time as a TMA member, Dr. Willis has been impressed by TMA's proactive approach to physicians' challenges. Thus he supported medical school President Kirk A. Calhoun, MD's choice to continue to cover TMA membership dues for 100% of the institution's academic physicians.

"I've supported that as dean for our faculty. The voice of academic physicians is generally underrepresented, and I wanted to ensure we have that voice," he said.