

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

SALAZAR TO DIRECT BATSON HOSPITAL'S COMPREHENSIVE PEDIATRIC HEART PROGRAM

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JACKSON, Miss. – Dr. Jorge Salazar has joined the Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children as the new chief of congenital heart surgery.

Salazar, also associate professor of surgery and director of the congenital heart program, previously was associate professor of surgery and pediatrics at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

His experience and expertise will enable Batson to have its own comprehensive children's heart surgery program for Mississippi and the region, building on the hospital's 2-year-old partnership with Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., said Dr. Walter Merrill, professor and chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. Salazar will lead efforts to recruit additional personnel in pediatric cardiology, pediatric intensive care and pediatric anesthesia to establish Batson's program as a world-class congenital heart center.

"He is a technically gifted surgeon who has achieved excellent results in the repair of complex and high-risk congenital defects, including in newborns. We anticipate that he will further develop our program in an exemplary manner," said Merrill, a cardiothoracic surgeon.

Salazar received his training in general surgery and cardiothoracic surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital, followed by an additional fellowship year focusing on congenital heart surgery at the University of California-San Francisco.

He also has served as a faculty member at the University of Texas-San Antonio, and he was a member of the Baylor College of Medicine faculty while working in one of the largest pediatric heart surgery programs in the country at Texas Children's Hospital. Salazar has performed more than 2,000 congenital heart operations, Merrill said.

The development of a comprehensive children's heart surgery program began with the Medical Center's partnership with Children's National in 2008. Batson Hospital officials conducted an extensive review of the country's top-rated programs and chose Children's National to help achieve its goal.

Dr. Richard Jonas, one of the world's leading pediatric heart surgeons, directs a highly skilled, multidisciplinary team that has operated on and helped care for patients at Batson, alongside UMMC faculty and staff. In the past, more complicated cases have been handled at Children's National and other medical centers.

Between April 2008 and March 2010, Jonas' team performed 52 operations in Mississippi and 81 in Washington. Salazar expects to continue to refer the most complex cases to Children's National during a transition period.

"The state of Mississippi is tremendously in debt to Dr. Jonas and the investment of time he's made here," Salazar said. "We will continue that relationship and build on what they've already done."

Salazar acknowledges his plans are ambitious and there's hard work ahead. He said the citizens of Mississippi deserve to have the very best care available within the borders of their own state.

"Almost everything that's worthwhile is a challenge. We definitely have the resources, the people and the commitment to make it happen," he said.

Dr. Owen "Bev" Evans, interim chair of pediatrics, said Salazar helps with Batson Hospital's mission to provide care to all children with heart disease.

"Together with the diagnostic and interventional cardiology service, the open heart surgery program will ensure that children with heart disease will get excellent care without leaving Mississippi," he said.

Salazar said Batson Hospital's pediatric heart surgery program will have the same expectations as any of the leading pediatric heart centers in the country, and that kind of success depends on a team approach to taking care of patients.

"The bottom line is not only to take care of all the children, but also the adults with congenital heart disease to achieve the very best results. Anything other than excellence is not acceptable," he said.

Our program depends on all the team members being strong. When you're in the trenches taking care of these complex patients, you need to be in there with your partners, your teammates."

The opportunity to change lives and to fill a need in Mississippi drew Salazar to the Medical Center. A father of five, Salazar said he understands every child's value very well.

"It's a very important responsibility that we have to the patients and their families because they are entrusting us with their children's hearts and lives," he said.

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