



Improved person-centered access to musculoskeletal care

OVERVIEW:

A pilot project providing musculoskeletal care to low-income and uninsured Travis County residents – a three-month-old collaboration between the Dell Medical School, Seton Healthcare Family, the Community Care Collaborative (a partnership between Central Health and Seton) and community physicians – works to transform health by:

- **Increasing the number of musculoskeletal specialists actively providing care to this population:** The program creates a sensible, systematic diagnosis process focused on treatments that are appropriate to a patient's condition, preferences and values.
- **Reducing the legacy waiting list to see a musculoskeletal specialist:** 267 patients have been seen by musculoskeletal specialists under this pilot, and the waiting list has decreased by more than 730 referrals through a system-oriented approach developed by the program's architects.
- **Cutting wait times for newly referred patients who most need to see a musculoskeletal specialist for their condition:** In the program's short three-month history, about 30 percent of newly referred patients – generally those in the most serious conditions – have waited just 30 days or less for an appointment with a specialist; program leaders hope to build on this success as the effort moves to its next phase.

THE NEED:

Orthopedics—the treatment of injuries or disorders related to the musculoskeletal system—is one of the highest-need areas for low-income and uninsured residents, exacerbated by a rapidly aging population. Patients needing this care have faced a waiting list for appointments that sometimes exceeded a year.

THE PROJECT:

In June, Dell Medical School, the Community Care Collaborative, Seton Healthcare Family and community physicians launched a pilot project seeking to expand access to musculoskeletal care for low-income and uninsured residents. The effort:

- Provides better access to appropriate musculoskeletal care through additional Dell Med and community providers and resources;
- Pilots a new referral and triage process to emphasize clinical expertise and individual patients' needs;
- Uses a multidisciplinary team to treat the patient's condition;
- Makes a musculoskeletal specialist available for telephone or email consultations with primary care physicians and nurses; this helps patients get the appropriate level of self-care, primary care, and specialty care much more efficiently and prevents potentially unnecessary referrals;
- Educates patients on how to optimize health, reduce pain and improve function and quality-of-life.



CENTRAL HEALTH

THE EFFECTS:

This partnership:

- Ensured that newly referred patients facing the greatest need or worst pain received attention from a specialist as quickly as possible.
- Reduced the number of patients waiting to see a musculoskeletal specialist – securing appointments for 267 patients;
- Tripled the rate of patients addressed per week without increasing the number of patients having surgery by augmenting access and working with patients to optimize their outcomes when surgery is chosen – thereby maximizing the value of health care resources where they can impact musculoskeletal disease as well as overall health;
- Expedited care of patients who had been waiting in the wrong queue by referring them to the most appropriate setting.

NEXT STEPS:

Partners are trying to extend the pilot project's benefits, in part by securing funding to extend the program through Central Health's budget process. A final decision about how to expand the program is tentatively set September.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The changes created through this pilot project have fundamentally increased the ability for low-income and uninsured patients in Travis County to get care for their musculoskeletal ailments.
- While there is a real need for access and improved referral management, simply adding providers isn't enough – low-income and uninsured patients need access to the most appropriate provider in order to manage their care.
- These sorts of systemic transformations are central to Dell Med's mission to revolutionize the way people get and stay healthy.
- The benefit to the community is a direct dividend from the community's investment in Dell Medical School – it represents the sorts of changes that Dell Med and its partners are extending to other areas of care, such as women's health.
- This is a collaborative effort involving a number of partners across the region, and it represents the widespread ambitions to make Austin and Travis County a model healthy city and community.