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DFW Employers Collaborated to Create Standardized Care and Improved Quality for Low Back Pain

Program found employers could improve quality and save money by working with providers to define and agree on course of care, measure progress and share results data

Dallas – Dec. 12, 2018 – The [Dallas-Fort Worth Business Group on Health](#) (DFWBGH) shared progress to date for its Innovative Quality Healthcare Collaborative (IQ Healthcare), a program launched in 2016 to help employers work more closely with providers and health plans to re-design the fragmented process of care. The focus of the program was to improve quality and cost of care for musculoskeletal conditions, beginning with uncomplicated low back pain. Program results indicate that if only 49% of local providers adhered to an evidence-based care process for appropriate therapy for lower back pain (an increase of only 20%), area employers could save over \$10 million a year.

Leveraging the collective impact of DFWBGH employers – the ultimate purchasers of healthcare for nearly 800,000 employees and their families – the collaborative worked with a group of healthcare providers (Baylor Scott and White Health Texas Provider Network, Catalyst Health Network, Spine Team Texas, and Texas Back Institute) to develop an agreed upon course of care for patients with low back pain following evidence-based guidelines. The goal was to improve the quality and efficiency of low back pain treatment, as evidenced by physicians' adherence to the clinically accepted treatment, which begins with an office visit for evaluation, followed by physical therapy as the initial treatment, then if medically necessary, imaging, then injection if warranted, before resorting to surgery.

DFWBGH worked with data aggregator Koan Health to use de-identified market data from three health plans (Aetna, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas and Cigna) to assess the services provided and cost per episode to fully understand how to get employees healthy, reduce variation and increase quality of care for treatment of uncomplicated low back pain.

“We started on this path with four initial provider groups due to concerns about the variation and sometimes unnecessary care and high cost of treating low back pain,” said Marianne Fazen, DFWBGH executive director. “This collaborative has shown that when employers work closely with healthcare providers, systems and plans to promote widespread adoption of standardized care, quality can improve. We plan to continue efforts to promote quality, cost-effectiveness, transparency and accountability in our community.”

“In an unmanaged situation, there is much variation in how care is delivered resulting in some patients receiving sub-standard care,” said Scott Conard, MD, DFWBGH medical director. “It’s exciting to see the improvements that can be made by following standard treatment protocols and adherence to clinical care pathways. The goal is for the patient to have the healthy outcome they seek without surgery, unless necessary.”

The North Texas benchmark market data included 77,735 patients that incurred 87,287 incidents of low back pain (episodes). The benchmark data includes claims incurred in 2016 and 2017 and indicates that the best practice for the established standard of care was followed 29% of the time in the overall market data. In the

benchmark report, the participating providers were above this mark, but there was still opportunity to update some treatment protocols and improve the adherence to the standard care pathway.

DFWBGH completed a balanced analysis of the data and concluded that episodes that followed the established process and standard of care were significantly lower in relative cost than the episodes that did not--overall \$599 compared to \$1,978 per episode, or about 70% less. If 20% of the market could be impacted, it would result in an estimated savings of over \$10 million a year.

“This effort has provided North Texas employers with greater insights as we continually navigate the delicate balance between quality, outcomes and cost,” said Brian Dickerson, DFWBGH president and director of Human Resources for the City of Fort Worth. “This is about more than bending the cost curve, as keeping employees healthy is an essential aspect of this program’s vision.”

[Additional details can be found in a video update by Dr. Conard for area employers.](#)

For further information about DFWBGH’s mission and purpose of the Innovative Quality Healthcare Collaborative, please contact Donita Doubet, IQ Healthcare program manager at doubet@dfwbgh.org or 214-382-3036.

About DFWBGH

The [Dallas-Fort Worth Business Group on Health](#) (DFWBGH) is a regional coalition of employers dedicated to improving healthcare quality, cost-effectiveness, transparency and accountability. Representing over 75 corporate members with 800,000 local individuals spending over \$4 billion in healthcare annually, members include American Airlines, Brinker International, City of Fort Worth, Dallas Area Rapid Transit, DynCorp International, Energy Future Holdings, Greyhound Lines, Inc., JCPenney, The Neiman Marcus Group, Sabre Holdings, Southwest Airlines, and Texas Instruments. A member of the Texas Business Group on Health and the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, DFWBGH’s goals are to educate and empower employers and their employees to make informed healthcare-related decisions and to encourage healthcare providers to continuously improve their performance. Follow on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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