



November 25, 2014

Dear Sunset Commission Members:

I am writing this letter as a point of clarification on Parkland Health & Hospital System's position on the Sunset Commission's staff report on the Health and Human Services Commission and in particular the recommendations on Issue # 9 (NorthSTAR). Recently, the North Texas Behavioral Health Authority sent a letter, which could be interpreted as suggesting that Parkland disagrees with the Sunset staff recommendations and supported NTBHA's position.

As the only public health system in Dallas County, 80 percent of Parkland's patient population is uninsured or on Medicaid. Last year we served over 1.2 million individuals throughout our system and had over 8,500 visits to our psychiatric emergency department. Besides our psychiatric emergency department, Parkland provides patient-centered behavioral health care in outpatient settings including specialized services such as post-partum mental health care, geriatric psychiatry, HIV psychiatry, as well as a full array of therapy, neuropsychological and psychological testing. Parkland serves these patients without consideration of their income status and without a contract with Value Options.

While NorthSTAR has been beneficial to our community, our region is underfunded compared to the statewide average spent on behavioral health services; and the program design makes it difficult to integrate physical and behavioral health care. The impact of an underfunded behavioral health care system has resulted in reduced overall emergency department capacity due to the boarding of patients with behavioral health problems who cannot be transferred to an appropriate inpatient setting. Additionally, Parkland sees increased emergency department and inpatient psychiatric readmissions as well as increased uncompensated care costs.

According to studies, adults with serious mental illness die on average 25 years earlier than the general population. The traditional delivery system model fails to appropriately integrate physical and behavioral healthcare which contributes to these poor outcomes. Parkland treats the whole patient- both the physical and behavioral health side in order to ensure quality healthcare services are provided throughout the continuum of care. Our region must establish better partnerships with state and local policy leaders and improved collaboration among all healthcare providers. Parkland has not taken a position on whether this should be done by modifying the NorthSTAR arrangement or by implementing broader system changes, but it must be done in order to better serve our community.



Parkland

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of Sunset staff recommendations for Issue #9 and all of the recommendations for the Health and Human Services agencies. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have questions on the delivery of healthcare services that Parkland provides to our community.

Sincerely,

Frederick P. Cerise, MD, MPH
President and Chief Executive Officer