



March 19, 2018

Senator Charles Schwertner, MD
Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services Committee

Re: Hearing on Texas Healthcare Information Collection Program

Dear Chairman Schwertner:

I am writing on behalf of the Texas Orthopaedic Association (TOA) to provide comments regarding the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services' hearing on the Texas Healthcare Information Collection (THCIC) program. TOA was founded in 1936 and currently represents over 1,400 Texas orthopaedic surgeons. The organization's mission is to provide outstanding musculoskeletal care to Texas patients.

TOA appreciates the committee's decision to hold a hearing on THCIC and review the program's utility. The June 2014 Department of State Health Services Sunset Staff Report concluded: "A key goal of the health care information collection program is to provide consumers with information about healthcare quality and costs to encourage informed decision making, but DSHS has not yet met this challenge."

Past legislation raised several key questions about THCIC, including:

- Are the data useful to patients? Do the data result in greater quality and efficiency within the state's health care system? Some stakeholders argued that the data could not be used by patients to make meaningful choices because it is not user friendly.
- Do the resources required to complete the data justify the outcome?

Innovative New Quality Tools

TOA strongly encourages the Committee to examine these important questions and determine whether the program provides data that can help patients determine quality and efficiency related to their health care services.

In addition, TOA hopes that this hearing will serve as a catalyst for lawmakers to learn more about the innovative tools that orthopaedic surgeons are utilizing to deliver useful quality data to patients that will help them become better consumers of health care. Several examples of programs that orthopaedic surgeons are utilizing include patient-reported outcomes (PROs), shared decision-making tools, and registries such as the American Joint Replacement Registry (AJRR).

An increasing number of orthopaedic surgeons are embracing PROs to measure whether clinical care improved the two primary goals of musculoskeletal care: to improve mobility and decrease pain. Not only can the data be used to determine which services are most appropriate for certain populations, the data can also be used as a shared decision-making tool for patients prior to surgery.

Senator Judith Zaffirini recognized the potential value of PROs to enhance quality in the state's health plans by directing the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) and Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS) to study the potential use of PROs within their programs. Governor Abbott signed SB 55 into law, and ERS and TRS recently published a request for information.

It is important to note that the benefit of PROs is not limited to orthopaedics. Other medical specialties are relying on PROs to track outcomes and enhance quality.

The Importance of Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASCs)

TOA also believes that this hearing is an opportunity to educate lawmakers about the importance of ASCs, which take part in the THCIC program. ASCs allow patients to have same-day surgeries and procedures outside of the hospital setting. In addition, patients may find ASCs to be a more affordable setting for certain services.

Over 1.7 million surgeries and procedures were performed in Texas' approximately 420 ASCs during DSHS's latest one-year reporting period (July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017). Of those cases, 5.93 percent were related to orthopaedics.

At the federal payer level, Medicare has initiated programs to demonstrate the value of ASCs to patients. A provision in the 21st Century Cures Act directed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create a searchable website for Medicare beneficiaries to compare out-of-pocket costs and total expenses related to services provided in two different settings: ASCs and hospital outpatient departments. The website is expected to be introduced in 2018.

It is important to note that patients and surgeons should work together to determine which facility will be the most appropriate venue for a surgery.

Sincerely,



Bobby Hillert
Executive Director
Texas Orthopaedic Association