

## Making Decisions Better at Scott and White Hospital

“The most expensive technology that we confront as an organization, is this: The Physician’s Pen!”

Holding his pen aloft in the years before EMRs were common, Don Cauthen, MD, former Vice-President for Ambulatory Care at the Scott and White Hospital System in Temple, Texas, kicked off our two-day workshop on evidence-informed decision making and information mastery. Approximately 60 primary care physicians participated, learning about and practicing the skills presented in our online certification course.

The effect must have been instantly recognized. This workshop, originally slated as a one-off presentation supported by a grant to improve cancer screening, was followed by a call to arrange another workshop to spread the word. To attract surgical specialists, our next workshop was co-presented by an orthopedic surgeon. From 2001 - 2005 we would travel to central Texas to present the workshop 6 more times, eventually training nearly 350 primary care and specialist physicians, changing the culture to embrace the use of evidence when making decisions and providing medical care that has been shown to affect patient-oriented outcomes.

What happened? Attendees embraced new concepts to undergird their clinical decision-making. A focus on patient-oriented rather than disease-oriented evidence. The recognition that some guidelines are more trustworthy than others. A recognition that everyone, including themselves, is “hard-wired” to think using rules-of-thumb that sometimes result in bad decisions.

They also realized they were not alone in their need to transform the way they make decisions. They saw one another struggle with these new ways of thinking. As Dr. Cauthen also mentioned in his introduction, they “passed through a confusion stage.” But they did it together. They went back to their work transformed and eager to share the new way of thinking they had worked to embrace. It didn’t happen to every attendee, but enough. Their culture began to change.

Three years later, Consumer Reports magazine proclaimed, “Aggressive medical care can lead to more pain, with no gain,” highlighting the Scott and White Hospital System as providing, among 93 integrated care systems, the “most conservative care” (i.e., lowest cost, lowest referral rate to specialists) to patients in their last two years of life while providing quality care at least as good, as the most aggressive care, provided by a New York City hospital.

Our workshops may not have been solely responsible for these accolades. The hospital system has been a leader in developing guidelines and focusing on quality. The effect of providing our training for many members of the institution was to aid in changing a medical culture that, like most medical cultures, had difficulty embracing growing realization that *less* medical care is better medical care.

In his introduction, Dr. Cauthen continued: “The harsh reality we face in medicine at Scott and White is: We and our patients can no longer afford anecdotal medicine!” Despite the development of systems of care that lead to standardization, most decisions made by physicians are not covered by practice policies and guidelines. To improve quality of care while at the same time decreasing its cost, there must be more of an effort to change the medical culture and the way these decisions are made. Our certification program, along with local leaders who support and encourage a culture change, will help this transition.

From LexisNexis



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**TOO MUCH TREATMENT? Aggressive medical care can lead to more pain, with no gain.;  
BY THE NUMBERS: CONSERVATIVE VS. AGGRESSIVE TREATMENT**

Among 93 integrated medical centers (**hospital/**medical school combinations), **Scott & White Memorial Hospital** in Temple, Texas, was the most conservative, and NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City the most aggressive in treating people with long-term chronic conditions in the last two years of life, according to the Dartmouth Atlas. Yet on various quality measures, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services rates care at **Scott & White** to be at least as good as that at NYU.

**MOST CONSERVATIVE CARE**

**Scott & White Memorial Hospital, Temple, Texas**

**DOLLARS SPENT**

Medicare costs per person in the last 2 years of life: **\$44,090.07**

**Average number of doctor visits (2 years):**

23 Primary-care Visits; 18 Specialist visits

**MOST AGGRESSIVE CARE**

**NYU Langone Medical Center, New York**

**DOLLARS SPENT**

Medicare costs per person in the last 2 years of life: **\$105,067.96**

**Average number of doctor visits (2 years):**

34 Primary-care visits; 97 Specialist visits