



Response to Sunday's Dallas Morning News Article

June 2, 2010

To the UT Southwestern Campus Community:

On Sunday, May 30, the Dallas Morning News published as a front page story a lengthy - but misleading and incomplete - article about UT Southwestern.

Most of the article focused on a case from 1998 involving a former employee, Jack Mooney, who had contacted federal authorities to raise questions about UT Southwestern's billing practices. Sunday's article offered no new information and repeated a number of false and unsubstantiated claims.

A governmental review at that time of UT Southwestern's billing practices found nothing to support an assessment of liability against UT Southwestern. There were no findings of wrongdoing, no charges, no fines, no penalties, and no settlements that resulted from the Mooney claims - which came at a time when the federal government was aggressively pursuing such cases against other academic medical centers and when some of these investigations resulted in significant fines and penalties elsewhere.

Additional allegations about residency supervision and billing now date back three years and have been thoroughly investigated multiple times, again with nothing found that would be the basis for wrongdoing or liability against UT Southwestern. The basis for the Dallas Morning News' specific assertion that a "probe has identified millions of dollars in potential fraud" resulting from UT Southwestern's billing for unsupervised resident services is unknown to us and lacks credibility. Such claims are an unjustified affront to the nearly 2,000 physicians who are here every day providing outstanding patient care and teaching those who will provide patient care in the future.

UT Southwestern has a long-standing and significant institutional commitment to ensuring that its practices - including but not limited to professional billing - are conducted in full accord with applicable law and regulations. We regularly conduct reviews across all areas of the university, as well as provide training via meetings and written materials to staff because the regulatory requirements governing the practice of medicine - and billing for its costs - are complex and continually changing. Our focus is to ensure that our compliance programs evolve with the ever-changing regulatory landscape so that institutional risk is reduced, and institutional resources are available to support our mission.

The Dallas Morning News article selectively excerpted phrases from internal billing compliance memos. By both omission and innuendo, they implied that our professional billings were in some way fraudulent, without any proof or documentation. The specific internal audits they cited related to billing processes, not actual billings.

In contrast to the article's implications, UT Southwestern's professional billing compliance program is well-developed and consistent with federal guidelines. In actuality, the 2010 audit states that the professional billing compliance program has "well-designed processes which are consistent with Office of Inspector General (OIG) Compliance Guidance for Physician Practices."

The audits and memos cited offer strong evidence of our aggressive commitment and approach to compliance, not the wrongdoing that was implied. In addition to other strict compliance controls, we have in place our Compliance Hotline - 877-507-7319 - for all employees to report any concerns related to our business practices, our research, or our patient care.

Our faculty is committed to delivering the very best care to all the patients they serve. I believe that the UT Southwestern community should also be proud of the role it has played in training approximately half of the physicians currently practicing in North Texas and of our world class research, which informs the patient care delivered by our committed professionals.

Residents learn by doing. At every major academic medical center in the nation, physician training is accomplished by allowing residents gradually to assume increasing responsibility in all areas of patient care, under supervisory guidelines that meet the strict standards of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). This organization regularly monitors and examines our residency supervision to ensure compliance, and we are proud that our surgical residency program meets the ACGME's highest level of review.

While we all regret having our reputation unfairly tarnished by our hometown newspaper, I trust you will respond by doing all you can to continue to support our mission of delivering excellence in patient care, training the physicians that will provide the patient care of the future, and conducting the scientific discovery and research that will save lives in decades to come.

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President
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