



Media Release

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Clinic Helps Disability Patients Seeking Benefits

State Bar of Texas committee recognizes doctor's efforts

(Houston, TX) Harris County Hospital District patients are finding it easier to apply for disability benefits thanks to the Disability Clinic at Strawberry Health Center. Dr. William Brett Perkison developed the clinic to evaluate patients who are sick or injured and applying for disability benefits from U.S. Social Security Administration.

"Applying for disability can be a drawn-out and frustrating process," says Perkison. "Our goal is to improve how patients are medically evaluated and do what we can to make the process easier for them."

To apply for disability, an applicant's doctor must complete a functional capacity evaluation that measures their ability to perform certain activities, like standing, stooping, pushing and lifting. Completing this lengthy evaluation requires specially designed equipment and a well-trained clinical staff who have a comprehensive understanding of physical and occupational therapy. According to Perkison, these are requirements most doctors don't have the time, knowledge or special equipment to accurately assess and complete during a routine 15-minute appointment.

Patients treated at the Strawberry Disability Clinic see both Dr. Perkison and a certified occupational therapist experienced in measuring impairments – appointments that can last over an hour each. Once the functional capacity evaluation is complete, Perkison reviews results and performs a comprehensive medical exam focused on the patient's problem or injury.

In addition to reviewing lab and test results and imaging studies, like x-rays, Perkison says it's important to learn about the person's medical and occupational history.

"I ask patients about their line of work and what led them to become incapacitated," he states. "That helps me understand their situations a little better and educate them on their possibilities."

Perkison's efforts to understand and help people seeking disability are what captured the attention and praise of the State Bar of Texas Standing Committee on Disability Issues.

The Hospital District clinic, which is experiencing high demand, is the first of its kind that Mitchell Katine, chairman of the committee and partner at Williams, Birnberg & Anderson in Houston, knows of. He says it's often difficult to find doctors who are willing to invest time and effort on disability cases.

"Ninety-five percent of doctors we've dealt with through the years are just not interested in dealing with all the tests and forms involved," Katine says. "That leaves most people with nowhere to turn for help."

Applying for disability can be an adversarial process, and if you don't have a doctor who can do a proper medical evaluation and fill the forms out correctly it can mean the difference between getting your benefits and being denied.

"There are so many people who give up because they just don't have the strength, stamina or desire to keep fighting for what they're entitled to," says Katine. "This clinic is filling a great need in the community and we hope others follow in Dr. Perkison's foot steps."

Local members of the State Bar of Texas Standing Committee on Disability Issues presented Perkison an award for his work with disability patients on Feb. 15 at the Strawberry Health Center.

Dr. Perkison is assistant professor of Family and Community Medicine with Baylor College of Medicine.

The Harris County Hospital District is the public healthcare system for the nation's third most populous county. It provides healthcare to more than 300,000 uninsured, under-insured and injured residents of Harris County. In addition to Strawberry Health Center, HCHD operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 11 other community health centers, a dental center, seven school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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