



# Harris County Hospital District

## Media Release

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Contact: Connie Chavez  
713-566-6430 or 713-566-4370

### **Clinic Provides Medical Home to Special Needs Children**

*Comprehensive, coordinated care keeps high-risk patients healthy*

By the time most children reach school age, they have been to a hospital emergency room at least once. But that's not the case with five-year old Christopher Marin, despite being born prematurely at 6 months and experiencing related health complications—including surgery to install a feeding tube and swelling in his brain.

Marin is a patient at the Pediatric Special Needs Clinic at Ben Taub General Hospital, which provides a medical home to children with chronic and complex medical conditions, like cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, and pre-maturity complications.

The clinic is dedicated to managing the care of only special needs patients.

“Our patients have complex needs,” said Mary Rocha, MD, MPH, assistant director of the clinic. “Some have so many issues they need to see anywhere from five to 10 pediatric sub-specialists. That's a lot for a family to have to deal with on their own.”

In addition to delivering routine and preventative services, the clinic coordinates all aspects of its patients' care. Rocha and the clinic's director, Kathryn Ostermaier, MD, work closely with nurses and a social worker to ensure their patients receive the comprehensive services they need. This includes collaborating with other physicians to share patient information, monitor treatments and outcomes, and ensure families understand and comply with doctors' orders.

Clinic staff conduct evaluations of all new patients to determine their specific needs. If they need to see a neurologist or physical therapist, they make sure the family gets an appointment. If an appointment is missed, they make sure it is rescheduled.

The goal, Rocha says, is to improve the child's overall health and prevent them from having to be institutionalized. In the clinic's five years of operation, there has been a noticeable decrease in patients' visits to the emergency room and inpatient admissions.

Families of special needs children require more than just medical care, however, according to Dinah Godwin, the clinic's social worker. Knowing how to “navigate the system” and access resources are key, she says.

“We make sure our families get the help they need, whether it's finding transportation to an appointment, talking to their child's school or joining a support group,” Godwin says. “We educate parents so they can become advocates for their children.”

Although the program's hand-held approach to comprehensive health care takes a lot of time, dedication and effort, it is crucial.

"Without the clinic the entire burden would fall on the family," according to Rocha. "They would have to figure out what their child's needs are and understand their medical condition all on their own."

The Pediatric Special Needs Clinic recently celebrated its five-year anniversary. For information on doctor referrals and appointments, please call 713-873-KIDS (5437).

The Harris County Hospital District is the public healthcare system for the nation's third most populous county and it provides healthcare to more than 300,000 Harris County residents. It encompasses Ben Taub and Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospitals; Quentin Mease Community Hospital; 12 community health centers, a dental center, seven school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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