



# Harris County Hospital District

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Finding a “Medical Home” is the Best Way to Care for Yourself**

*Harris County Hospital District celebrates National Health Center Week*

HOUSTON (Aug. 2, 2007) – You may have a cardiologist, a dentist and an eye doctor, but do you have a “medical home?”

A medical home is a health care provider who knows a patient and their entire health history. Aug. 5-11, 2007 is National Health Center Week, and the Harris County Hospital District is encouraging all residents to seek a medical home if they don’t have one already.

Nearly one in five residents don’t have a health care home that addresses their basic needs, according to the National Association of Community Health Centers.

The Harris County Hospital District’s community health centers have been serving as medical homes for area residents for 40 years, providing continuous primary and preventive care to more than 500,000 people in Harris County.

“Having a primary care home with a physician that works with a team of other health professionals such as nurses, nutritionists, social workers, and knowledgeable administrative staff is the best way to ensure coordination of care,” said Dr. Carlos Vallbona, chief of staff for HCHD’s Community Health Program.

Some people might consult with two or more physicians a year, which poses a problem with communication.

“Having a primary care physician and being a member of a medical home is the best way to ensure recommendations of specialists are not fragmented,” Vallbona said. “It is the best way to avoid unnecessary and expensive duplication of services, or even adverse side effects of various medications prescribed by different physicians who may not know exactly what their colleagues have prescribed.”

Without a medical home, people often turn to the emergency room for their primary care needs, which is not cost effective. Emergency rooms are designed for people who need urgent care, not routine patient visits.

To guide people to the best site for the care they need, the hospital district successfully launched “RightCare” in the summer of 2006, encouraging those needing primary health care services to go to a community health center rather than to area emergency departments.

At the hospital district, treatment in a primary care location, rather than in an emergency center, can save a patient at least \$200.

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most-populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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