

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN RESEARCHERS RECEIVE FEDERAL GRANT TO EVALUATE QUALITY OF ASTHMA CARE

DALLAS — June 17, 1997 — Allergy and asthma researchers at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas have received nearly \$1 million from the federal government to develop a system to evaluate the quality of care adult patients receive for asthma attacks.

The allergy and asthma team, led by Dr. Yvonne Coyle, assistant professor of internal medicine, is charged with developing a standardized system to evaluate the quality of medical methods used to treat chronic diseases. Initially, the system is aimed at eliminating costly and unneeded diagnosis and treatment procedures by identifying which tests and treatments best help asthma patients.

High-quality medical programs may translate into better patient satisfaction and a reduction in costs for medical centers, said Coyle.

"Because the expectation is that health-care organizations will soon require health-care providers to compete on the basis of quality as well as the cost of medical care, our ability to know what quality is and how to measure it is critical," she said.

For Coyle, who treats patients at Parkland Memorial Hospital, and her colleagues, who also see asthma patients at UT Southwestern's James W. Aston Ambulatory Care Center, keeping patients from having asthma attacks is a big concern because treating recurrent attacks is expensive.

She notes that up to 3,000 asthmatics visit Parkland's emergency room every year at a cost of between \$2.5 million and \$5.2 million.

UT Southwestern provides physician services for Parkland, where in 1995 the average age of an asthma patient who was treated in the hospital's asthma clinic was 42.5 years. About 49.3 percent of these patients were African-American; 28.1 percent were Caucasian; and 18.2 percent were Hispanic. Other races accounted for 4.4 percent.

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In addition to evaluating what happens at the hospital or clinics, Coyle and her colleagues realize that how asthma patients live and work plays a role in whether or not they have to seek medical treatment. "In essence, we want to find out what factors inside and outside the health-care system affect a patient's ability to recover from an asthma attack," she said.

The study, for which patients are still being recruited, also will identify whether allergens in the home or workplace affect the recovery rate from an asthma attack. By modifying patient behavior — making sure they take their medicine and avoid allergens at home or at work — treatment costs for emergency visits may be reduced.

The study, "Developing and Testing Asthma Quality of Care Measures," is funded by the Agency for Health Care Policy Research, an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services.

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