



Photos courtesy of Urology Partners of North Texas

For This Group of Urologists, Patient-Focused Care Isn't Just Lip Service

It's 8 a.m., and the phones are on fire at Urology Partners of North Texas's new clinic. A flood of patients are making the call-center banks light up this April 8th morning. They're calling to schedule an appointment with their trusted physician for help with everything from leaky bladder and prostate issues, to kidney stones and a host of other urologic ailments.

By the end of the day – the first for the new practice – nearly 11,000 calls will come in. It's both a testament to the high regard patients have for this group of docs, and a confirmation that the herculean efforts they've made to break free from the draconian dictums of corporate medicine were well worth it.

While much of the nation has been undergoing an exhausting and seemingly endless struggle session for the past decade, many of the country's sacred institutions have found themselves caught up in an unexpected fight for autonomy – including medicine.

Eager to corral more of the system to boost their bottom line, health-insurance companies and corporate heavyweights have made a bid for medical providers. In doing so, they've placed themselves smack in the middle of the sacred patient-physician relationship.

You don't have to be a brain surgeon to know that letting corporate bean counters try to excise the bond between patient and healer is dangerous folly. So, it wasn't surprising when

one group of doctors – the “surreptitious seven” – decided to reclaim the mantle of physician-led medicine. By doing so, they aimed to ensure the needs and concerns of their patients would truly come first.

They knew what they were in for. More importantly, they'd done it before.

The Seeds of Patient-First

All through the early and mid-2000s, a tight-knit team of North Texas physicians quietly set about building an enviable model of care. At its core was a rare hospital – rare because the physicians owned it. They served in its top leadership positions, sat on its board, established all of the organization's policies, and made all the management decisions. They did it all according to one guiding precept: always do what's best for the patient.

Their singular focus fueled a nimble, indefatigable, can-do culture that delivered on their promise of patient-centered care.

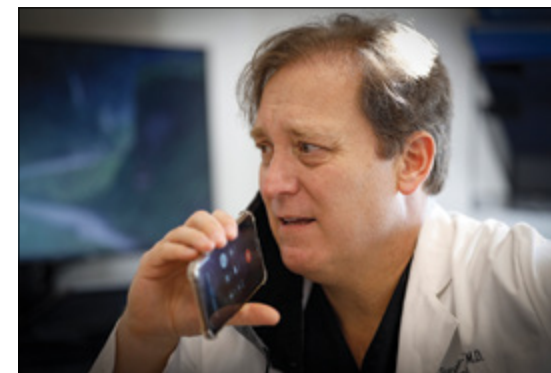
“We were always thinking, ‘How can we ensure the highest patient satisfaction? How can we maintain the highest levels of safety?’ Our facility was the Metroplex leader in those areas for many years,” says UPNT partner Mitch Abrahams, MD. “We were the leader because we had doctors making those decisions, not bureaucrats who don't really know how to improve things.”



Tracy Cannon-Smith, MD, FPMRS, explains treatment details to a patient before beginning an outpatient procedure at the UPNT Arlington Clinic.



Harrison “Mitch” Abrahams, MD, reviews a patient's chart just before stepping into the exam room.



Richard Bevan-Thomas, MD, consults with a colleague about a prostate cancer patient.



Physician assistant Ly Chu uses her iPad to successfully communicate with an elderly patient with poor vision and hearing.

Under their physician-led model, the group shifted into excel mode. They pioneered one of the nation's leading robotic surgery programs. They created Centers of Excellence to treat prostate cancer, pelvic prolapse, incontinence, men's health issues and more.

“We were a group that was used to creating things, building things, being in front of the pack,” Abrahams acknowledges.

Their patient-first momentum was derailed when an acquisition changed everything. In an analogy one doctor likes to use to describe the seismic shift, the doctors went from being bank owners to bank tellers. Suddenly, their decades of patient care and medical expertise became subservient to a bureaucratic machine that seemed woefully out of touch with patient-first concerns. When they started receiving mandates about treatments they could and could not administer, they'd had enough.

“There was so much red tape. Approval for anything had to be run through committee after committee. Bureaucracy interfered with our ability to take care of our patients,” UPNT managing partner Patrick Collini, MD, states simply. “So, we decided to build a practice where we could put all our skills, ideas and intense patient focus to work.”

Building a Better Healthcare Experience

As Goethe once famously encouraged, “Be bold, and mighty forces will come to your aid.”

As it turns out, a long-time patient owned the perfect space for a new clinic. Buildout was completed in just four months. By the time UPNT opened its doors, seven physicians had grown to 19—along with four physician assistants and an amazing support team. Today, there are 26 physicians and the practice is on an upward trajectory that shows no signs of slowing.

Making everything fall into place was a tremendous amount of hard work. Some of the docs admit it caused quite a few sleepless nights. Still, the group has been energized by its common purpose. “Now, patients get something they can't find many places: a physician-owned and managed medical group where the docs make all the decisions in order to best serve those who entrust us with their care,” adds UPNT partner Richard Bevan-Thomas, MD.

UPNT's care philosophy is emblazoned front and center on the practice's website – We are creating a different kind of healthcare experience.

“Trust, respect and genuine concern for our patients are at the heart of everything we do,” says UPNT partner Justin Tabor Lee, MD. “Nothing is more important than helping our patients live healthier, more fulfilling lives.”

Since day one, the mighty force Goethe referred to has manifested itself in a throng of patients. Even the COVID-19 pandemic couldn't kill the momentum. You only have to spend a few minutes perusing the heartfelt comments on the UPNT Facebook page and blog to see why they are so loyal.

“I feel very, very fortunate. I'm living a full life, enjoying my life, and I absolutely thank Dr. Waguespack for that,” shares a bladder and kidney cancer survivor.

“What a relief it is to finally meet a doctor who's actually optimistic and doesn't treat you like you're a number,” says a man whose life was turned upside down by BPH. “Dr. Moore cares for you like he's a friend. If it wasn't for him, I'd probably be sitting in a chair feeling sorry for myself. I love that man.”

“I hate to apply too much hero status to him. I know Dr. Bevan-Thomas probably fears it sometimes, but he's just going to have to suffer through it,”

confesses one prostate cancer survivor. "He is my hero. He saved my life. It's quite a gift. I'll never take it for granted."

A woman who once suffered with pelvic prolapse writes, "Dr. Tracy Cannon-Smith is absolutely the best! Takes time to listen and truly cares. Her entire staff is awesome – highly recommend!"

"A lot of doctors sell their specialty," one prostate cancer survivor notes. "A surgeon will say you have to have surgery. A radiologist will say you have to have radiation. Dr. Lee didn't do that. The first thing he said was, 'I really recommend that you get some other opinions.' He offered to bring in a radiologist and oncologist, and he gave me a copy of the NCCN guidelines. From the time I met Dr. Lee, I had a lot of faith. He was always upbeat. He always looked at me and said, 'You're going to be alright. You're going to be fine.'"

A woman with incontinence adds, "Thank you to Dr. Nuss, who has helped me navigate issues with my bladder and who went above and beyond when I had surgery!"

Everyone at UPNT is keenly aware that their patients can seek care at a number of facilities. "The fact that they choose and entrust our team isn't lost on us," says UPNT partner Keith Waguespack, MD. "We continue to work hard to earn their faith and confidence."

Big Plans for the Future

For doctors looking for a new professional home, UPNT is attractive on two fronts: physicians have an opportunity to make a real difference in their patients' lives and guide the destiny of the growing practice as an equal partner.

"It's an ideal setting for someone who wants to continually improve care and be at the forefront of how care is delivered," Dr. Abrahams says. "Some young docs want to be a 9-to-5



Urology Partners of North Texas

Harrison "Mitch" Abrahams, MD
 Jeffrey Applewhite, MD
 Jerry Barker, MD
 Richard Bevan-Thomas, MD
 Keith Bloom, MD
 Tracy Cannon-Smith, MD, FPMRS
 Paul Chan, MD
 Lira Chowdhury, DO
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 Adam Cole, MD
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 Kaitlyn Pizzini, PA
 Jason Poteet, MD
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 James Clifton Vestal, MD
 Keith Waguespack, MD
 Diane West, MD
 Amanda White, PA
 Keith Xavier, MD, FPMRS

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person with a lot of structure around them that's set in stone. The people who are attracted to our group are people who want to help improve our practice and find better ways of doing things. They're not satisfied with the status quo. They always have an eye on better, more cost-effective, more efficacious patient care."

Care providers who join UPNT will find the culture exudes a cohesive, collaborative esprit de corps that is rooted in teamwork. Teamwork that gives patients access to not just one physician, but all of its physicians.

"We're always talking with each other, putting our heads together, consulting with each other and helping one another," Dr. Bevan-Thomas explains. "What do you do with a patient in post-radiation failure? How do you manage a patient with an extremely large prostate and elevated PSA? We don't work in silos. We foster a group approach to each patient."

The camaraderie not only benefits patients in the day-to-day practice of medicine, but fuels a passion that gives rise to ambitious plans designed to offer patients more options for more affordable care. Along with clinics in Arlington, Fort Worth, Mansfield, Grapevine, Irving, Weatherford and Alliance, finishing touches are being added to a new outpatient surgical center and kidney-stone center in Arlington. A new radiation center is under construction in Fort Worth, and there are plans for an in-house pharmacy.

"We have so many ideas about ways we want to deliver more comprehensive, more affordable patient-focused care," Dr. Collini

adds. "As a new practice, we've already accomplished so much in just two years—especially when you consider the pandemic. We'd be further along if it weren't for COVID, but we survived and we're better and stronger for it." **A**

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Urology Partners of North Texas is creating a different kind of healthcare experience.

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Nothing is more important to us than helping patients live healthy, fulfilling lives.



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