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Professor and Chair

The Dr. and Mrs. James L. Holly Distinguished Professorship

Department of Family and Community Medicine

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RE: 2014 Texas Health Champion Award

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living
The University of Texas School of Public Health Austin Regional Campus
Attn: Amy Blum, Special Programs Coordinator
1616 Guadalupe, Suite 6.300
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear members of the Selection Committee of the Texas Health Champion Award:

I write this letter to enthusiastically support the application of Southeast Texas Medical Associates (SETMA) to receive the 2014 Texas Health Champion Award, specifically for their LESS (Lose weight, Exercise, Stop Smoking) Program.

My perspective is that of a leader in evaluation of innovations in primary care, chair of a department of Family and Community Medicine, professor of Public Health, elected member of the Institute of Medicine and practicing family physician. Obesity in Texas is a large and growing problem that requires multipronged approaches. Primary Care practices provide the opportunity to address obesity in a direct and effective way but often this opportunity is not realized because of the many competing demands of practice that require clinicians' attention.

The SETMA group has developed and implemented an intervention that is innovative, simple, personalized and that uses the full strength of electronic health information for the benefit of patients and families. The intervention includes nurses using templates within the electronic health record at virtually every visit to assess "weight-related" health risks, create a customized exercise "prescription", and evaluate and address smoking status. The resulting information is summarized in a personalized document designed to support the patient in making necessary behavioral changes. Both physician and nurses explain the document, reinforce their key messages and make referrals to relevant support programs offered in the practice or the community. This program has been in place since 1999 and is monitored in real time by publishing on-line publicly the rate of implementation by each of the clinicians in this multi-specialty clinic.

Routinizing this activity is a critical way to fully take advantage of the primary care visit, the use of a team approach and optimizing use of electronic health information. Rates of implementation of the intervention are over 90% for most of the clinicians [many nearly 100%], a feat difficult to emulate in other primary care practices. As described in the AHRQ's Health Care Innovations Exchange: Innovations and Tools to Improve Quality and Reduce Disparities, this program offers suggestive evidence of effectiveness by stabilizing the proportion of overweight patients and stabilizing the BMI average post intervention. SETMA serves a population that includes low income Medicare, Medicare Advantage, Medicaid enrollees and one third of their patients are African American.

In my more than 20 years of evaluations of interventions in more than 500 "real world" practices, the level of implementation and sustainability of the intervention is unparalleled. It is my belief that SETMA deserves to be recognized and promoted as a model of interventions in primary care practices that integrate clinical practice and community resources. It meets the criteria of inclusion of essential populations, sustainability and impact on the burden of obesity.

I believe that the award of the 2014 Texas Health Champion Award to SETMA will do much to serve as a beacon of what is possible in primary care to combat obesity and could be an impetus to encourage other practice groups to develop and implement similar interventions.

Sincerely,



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