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Metrocare Warns Impact of Impasse

Key mental and behavioral provider concerned about new contract cuts

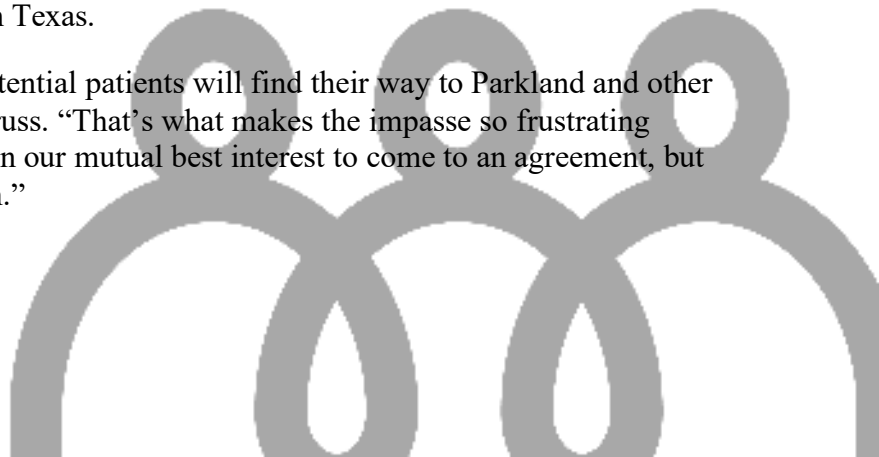
DALLAS, TX – Metrocare, the largest medical group providing mental and behavioral health services in Dallas County and North Texas has issued a warning regarding an “impasse” in contract negotiations with the North Texas Behavioral Health Authority (NTHBA). Discussions between staffs have been underway since late October when NTHBA officially revealed its intent to lower rates paid to Metrocare’s physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers and other frontline clinical care patient providers. The directive came almost two months into Metrocare’s 2019-2020 budget year.

The State of Texas charges NTBHA with the responsibility to contract with behavioral and mental health professionals who will provide care for North Texas’s growing uninsured population. For over 50 years, Metrocare (formerly Dallas County MHMR) has offered counseling, crisis intervention, medication management, rehabilitation assistance and other support for uninsured men, women and children. In Dallas County alone, some 300 of these individuals are seen daily in area clinics. Many of the patients are desperate for mental and emotional support, therapeutic care and, in some cases, in need of life-saving interventions.

“The mental/behavioral health communities and advocates applauded the 2019 Legislature’s decision to increase funding for these critical care services,” said Dr. John W. Burruss, Metrocare’s CEO. “Then we got blindsided in late October. That’s when NTBHA formally notified Metrocare of its intent to lower rates, even though we were well into the next fiscal year. Bottom line, they wanted our people to do more work for less money.”

Burruss and others predicted NTBHA’s action, if implemented, could significantly affect Parkland Hospital and other safety net providers in North Texas.

“If Metrocare’s services have to be reduced, potential patients will find their way to Parkland and other facilities who care for the uninsured,” said Burruss. “That’s what makes the impasse so frustrating because there will be far-reaching effects. It is in our mutual best interest to come to an agreement, but we’ve seen no movement in NTHBA’s position.”





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In an effort to move the dialogue forward, Metrocare’s Board voted in late January to invite NTBHA’s Board to attend a joint meeting for a mutual discussion of these important issues. There’s been no formal response to that invitation. Recent communications have acknowledged that negotiations would continue for 60 days, a stipulation in the overall contract. In addition to the meeting invitation last month, Metrocare delivered two new compromise proposals for consideration ten days ago. NTBHA officials, however, have not formally responded to Metrocare’s concepts for a resolution.

“NTBHA receives tax dollars from the state and then contracts with groups who provide mental and behavioral care for uninsured Dallas County residents,” said Burruss. “This specific patient population often presents with extraordinary challenges and diagnoses. This is difficult work, but we do it well. Therefore, we were stunned to receive the written notification about lower rates in late October.”

Metrocare’s volunteer Board Chairman Terry James also expressed concern about the contract rate reductions. If implemented, according to James, Parkland would feel the impact because Metrocare might not be able to efficiently provide all the current services for patients who come into the agency’s clinics.

“The Dallas County Commissioners expect us to care for our patients in an excellent manner, but they also demand that we operate a fiscally responsible organization,” said James. “Metrocare has made important changes such as hiring a talented and experienced CFO to manage finances and build our reserves. The Court expects us to run this place in the black, and a reduction in fees threatens our ability to do that.”

James said he and other board members are hopeful they can open the lines of communication with the NTBHA board in a joint meeting.

“In truth, our goals should be aligned,” said James. “This is not about getting what Metrocare wants; it’s about getting what our patients need. Concurrently, both of us are accountable to the Commissioners Court and the taxpayers to make those decisions in a fiscally responsible manner.”

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About Metrocare Services

Metrocare is the largest provider of mental health services in North Texas, serving more than 60,000 adults and children annually. For over 50 years, Metrocare has provided a broad array of services to people with mental health challenges and developmental disabilities. In addition to behavioral health care, Metrocare provides primary care centers for adults and children, services for veterans and their families, accessible pharmacies, housing and supportive social services. Alongside the clinical care, researchers and teachers from Metrocare’s Altshuler Center for Education & Research are advancing mental health beyond Dallas County while providing critical workforce to the state. For more information, visit metrocareservices.org or call 214-743-1200. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

