

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler



ENDOWMENT PROFILE

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Supporting a Patient-Centered Approach to Caring for the Whole Person

AS A YOUNG DOCTOR fresh out of medical school, Dr. George A. Hurst learned early on about the importance of treating the whole patient and not just the symptoms an illness presented.



Dr. George A. Hurst

he had a profound impact on how I view patient care,” Dr. Hurst recalls. “He would often invite chaplains, social workers, and others who worked closely with patients to our medical staff meetings and he encouraged us to listen carefully to their input.”

That philosophy stayed with Dr. Hurst, who led the institution known today as The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler (UTHSCT) for 27 years, beginning in 1964.

Known for being compassionate and caring, Dr. Hurst’s philosophy of holistic patient care served as the impetus behind the creation of the George A. Hurst Distinguished Professorship in Whole Person Medicine, which was renamed in his honor in 1997.

“The best medical care is focused not only on patients’ medical needs, but on their spiritual, emotional, social, and economic needs as well,” says Dr. Hurst. During his tenure at UTHSCT, Dr. Hurst instituted training programs to help patient care providers better understand holistic medicine and communicate with more compassion.

Dr. David Shafer, an internal medicine physician, diabetes

specialist, and UTHSCT professor, shares Dr. Hurst’s vision of medical care that is more patient-centered. Dr. Shafer has been the holder of the Hurst Professorship since 2000. Funding from this endowment has helped to support many important projects, including training for him and his staff that promotes a more integrated approach to diabetes care and education.

Recently, Dr. Shafer and his colleagues surveyed more than 300 patients about holistic care. The survey asked patients to indicate whether and how they wanted their physicians to address their spiritual and emotional needs. The survey’s results, which are being prepared for publication, found that a majority of patients, regardless of age or gender, prefer that their doctors bring up such issues.

Dr. Shafer says these findings echo his own experiences from more than 25 years practicing medicine: “I’ve found that understanding a patient’s spiritual and emotional outlook and personal circumstances not only helps me to provide better health care, but it also enables me to offer better guidance on issues like end-of-life directives.”

For Dr. Hurst, who retired as UTHSCT’s chief executive officer in 1998, the idea of holistic care is a return to medicine’s roots. Medical practitioners of old considered the spiritual and emotional needs of their patients as part of the health care they provided. “With new technologies, advanced therapies, managed care, and the business of medicine, we’ve moved away from caring for the whole person,” says Dr. Hurst. “Advances are wonderful, but we can’t forget who is at the center of the medical care we provide--the patient.”

Through the George A. Hurst Distinguished Professorship in Whole Person Medicine, one of the lasting legacies left by Dr. Hurst will be his commitment to combining the evolution of medicine with a patient-centered approach to caring for the whole person.

For more information on supporting patient care advancement through an endowment, please contact Richard “Mac” Griffith by email at mac.griffith@uthct.edu or by phone at (903) 877-5135.

If you would like more information about how to start an endowment, please contact: [Richard “Mac” Griffith](mailto:Richard%20Mac%20Griffith) | Mac.Griffith@uthct.edu | 903-877-5135