



# Building the Ideal Health System

*CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic: mission-driven, measured, and managed*

By Scott Smith, M.D.

**Editor's Note:** In January of 2018, AMGA named CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic as the recipient of the 2018 Acclaim Award. The Acclaim Award, supported by AMGA Foundation, the association's nonprofit arm, is designed to recognize and celebrate the successes that medical groups and other organized systems of care have achieved in improving the value—the quality and cost of care—of the healthcare services they provide to their communities. It honors organizations that are meeting the IOM Aims for Improvement and are taking the necessary steps to become a High-Performing Health System™ as defined by the AMGA. Here we share the thoughts of CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic's Senior Vice President and Institute Chair of Primary Care and highlights from their initiative.

**C**HRISTUS Trinity Clinic is a not-for-profit multi-specialty practice founded in 1995 and is part of CHRISTUS Health's Northeast Texas Region, which also includes CHRISTUS Trinity Mother Frances Health System, CHRISTUS Good Shepherd Health System, and CHRISTUS St. Michael Health System. The group of distinguished providers includes more than 650 physicians and advanced practice professionals with over 41 specialties providing a world-class continuum of care to patients in 82

locations across the region. Over the past two-and-a-half years, CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic has experienced exponential growth, nearly doubling the number of providers, while remaining true to their mission and serving their communities by meeting the Institute of Medicine Aims for Improvement.

CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic is physician-governed and -led, governed by a physician peer Board of Directors and led by a physician president, vice presidents, Chief Administrative Officer, and team.

Additionally, physician-led committees pursue excellence in the areas of Quality, Patient Experience, Access, Compensation, Strategic Growth and Practice Standards. While independently licensed and managed, CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic is part of a 37-county tertiary hospital system, which allows it to have physician-hospital CEO leadership partnership across the entire region. Within each specialty group, CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic implements a dyad leadership model of a physician institute chair partnered with an administrative leader.

## Starting with Primary Care

Through a truly clinically integrated delivery system, all providers share the same electronic medical records, the organization shares the same service and quality goals, and inpatient and ambulatory physicians frequently meet in committees to improve transitions of care. All of CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic legacy primary care sites are certified as level III Patient-Centered Medical Homes (PCMH) by the National Committee for Quality Assurance, and we are pursuing certification on all newly acquired locations. This year, CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic is approaching a rate that will generate over 1,250,000 ambulatory clinic visits annually.

To handle this incredible volume of patients while delivering care recognized nationally for patient experience and quality, CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic is continually learning, using data and informatics to consistently measure and improve performance, and are early adopters of best practices and, where none exists, working to create them and disseminate. In preparation and application for the Acclaim Award, we examined several aspects of our organization through the lens of the award and how it aligns with our mission and goals for providing care.

All three of the narratives chosen for our Acclaim application—Patient Experience Project,

Population Health Improvement Project, and Revitalization of Primary Care Initiative—began with an examination of our accountability structure, essentially how we direct CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic toward defined goals ranging from patient experience to strategic growth. By having an aligned organization, we can provide a more efficient and effective patient experience. (For more detail on the Patient Experience Project, see [amga.org/acclaim](http://amga.org/acclaim).)

CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic has developed a robust Population Health department, which includes dozens of care coordinators, nurse navigators, coaches, experts and support staff. We have created over 50 care registries in the electronic medical record (EMR), such as COPD, Chronic Care Management, and Wellness registries. The care coordinators review all of these registries and then identify care gaps for each patient, actively outreach to each patient, and schedule appointments per protocol as appropriate. This coordination is the continuation of an accessible and helpful structure stemming from each patient's first interactions with CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic—the “front door” of primary care. By strengthening primary care, we are able to have a far-reaching impact on surrounding communities, as well as internal operations and specialty departments.

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# Acclaim Recipient

Here are highlights of CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic's initiatives, which led to being named the recipient of the 2018 Acclaim Award.

## 1 Accountability

- ▶ Dashboards were created for all departments within the system and grouped with the HPHS attributes.
- ▶ They hired an external physician-coaching firm, which interviewed each physician leader and executive team member in order to create a custom leadership curriculum that would best fit the needs of their leadership team.
- ▶ Monthly meetings between directors and managers, as well as between managers and their team members, promote an environment of accountability related to departmental performance targets.

## 2 Care Coordination

- ▶ Quality reporting was upgraded to a self-service, web-based reporting portal, and results are shared at monthly meetings of providers and their teams.
- ▶ The system employs care coordinators and assigns them to a primary care team of providers. At each location, the care coordinator supports the Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) model via pre-visit planning, scheduling of appropriate preventive services, and identifying any concerns or health problems the patient may have for his/her upcoming physician appointment.
- ▶ Pursuit of quality is powered by value-based contracts that cover approximately 25% of adult primary care patients.

## 3 Organized Systems of Care

- ▶ CHRISTUS' multidisciplinary, employed medical group is supported with a fully integrated electronic medical record. This entire network of providers and facilities could not operate efficiently and effectively were it not for the shared governance structure that incorporates physician leadership in all clinical decisions and strategy, sound financial stewardship, administration, and management.

## Working Together Is Key

Over the past few years, we accomplished feats that many said could not be done. We achieved high quality measures, achieving the 90th percentile for 11 out of 14 HEDIS measures in 2015. As of August 2017, we are achieving 12 out of 15 ACO measures. We have over 90% of our clinics with same day/next day new patient access, 80.5% improvement in new patient access, significant improvement in CG-CAHPS scores, streamlined centralized scheduling, robust provider reporting, and performance transparency. This robust investment in primary care strategies has positioned our clinic well for future value-based contracting and will enable us to continue providing safe, timely, efficient, equitable, high-quality, patient-centered care to our community.

CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic is improving quality of care and reducing the cost of health services while achieving and maintaining high levels of patient satisfaction and provider engagement.

Through a culture of cooperation between administration and clinicians, we work together to achieve common goals. That cooperation is nurtured with the support of robust data reporting, providing transparency and accountability for all members of the healthcare team. We have leveraged the power of our electronic health record to automate high-functioning processes, and

created decision support tools that improve quality while not compromising efficiency. This organized system of care, partnered with compensation practices that support our system goals, has enabled us to be a high-functioning health system. These attributes, along with our core mission principles, guide our physicians, advanced practice providers, clinical staff and support staff to provide the highest quality of compassionate care. We have implemented processes that enabled us to achieve high-quality measures, improve patient access, achieve high physician engagement, and prepare for upcoming financial and regulatory healthcare changes. [GRU](#)

**Scott Smith, M.D.**, is senior vice president and institute chair of primary care at CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic.

**To read more about CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic's initiatives, including an in-depth look at their Patient Experience Project, as well as more information about the AMGA Acclaim Award and how to apply, visit [amga.org/acclaim](http://amga.org/acclaim).**



The team from CHRISTUS Trinity Clinic receiving the Acclaim Award with AMGA President and CEO Dr. Jerry Penso (left) and AMGA CMO Dr. John Kennedy (right).

## 4 Compensation Practices and Incentives

- ▶ To remain successful with ever-changing physician reimbursements, CHRISTUS began modifying their physician compensation structure to align with value-based incentives.

## 6 Quality Measurement and Improvement Activities

- ▶ Their Quality Committee has excelled in fulfilling its vision statement to use the resources available to help clinicians efficiently provide safe, evidence-based, high-quality care. As a result, they evaluate and attempt to improve performance in many areas outside of traditional quality metrics.

## 5 Efficient Provision of Services

- ▶ Their medical group division, in conjunction with Medicare Shared Savings Program (MSSP) Track 1 ACO, has implemented claims and electronic health record data analytics to impact the per capita cost of health care.

## 7 Using Technology and Evidence-Based Medicine

- ▶ The system heavily promoted the use of a patient portal to teams and patients as a tool to achieve patient-centered and timely care. Through the use of the patient portal, patients are better able to be engaged in their health care and better understand the clinical decisions made during their visits through access to after-visit summaries of all their recent visits, lab results, vital signs, and imaging results.
- ▶ CHRISTUS automated a process whereby a patient's elevated blood pressure would trigger the EMR to include hypertension information on the after-visit summary. These tools also assisted providers in the reduction of duplicated testing and services, reduced medication errors through best practice advisories when contraindications appeared, allowed up-to-date medication reconciliation and speedy referrals, and expedited prescription ordering.