

COMMUNITY CARE. STATEWIDE IMPACT.

UT Health East Texas and UT Tyler: Providing Advanced Trauma Care and Leading Research for the Benefit of All Texans

The 14 public and teaching hospitals and health systems that comprise the membership of the Teaching Hospitals of Texas account for just 4 percent of all Texas hospitals. But their reach and impact are statewide through direct patient care, healthcare workforce training and education, trauma preparedness and response, and research and clinical trials. Often, but not always, located in a major urban center, they are vital partners for the rural hospitals around them and instrumental to a strong healthcare system statewide.

This series profiles the many ways that Texas' teaching and public hospitals support rural health infrastructure and access to care in the state's many rural communities.

An Advanced Trauma Care Center for East Texas and Beyond

UT Health Tyler is East Texas' only designated Level I trauma center. It covers a 35-county, predominantly rural area as part of the UT Health East Texas system that also comprises eight other hospitals, including a couple of designated Level IV trauma facilities. More than 55 percent of East Texas' residents live in a designated rural area, the largest proportion of any region in the state.

Last year, UT Health Tyler's Level I trauma center admitted 1,759 patients.

UT Health Tyler's Level I trauma center cares for patients with injuries that are commonly seen in urban centers, such as motor vehicle crash injuries, but also cares for patients with demographically specific traumatic injuries that are agricultural or industrial in nature, resulting from heavy machinery accidents, for example. In addition, with a disproportionately older population in the region, injuries from falls are common. These injuries can be serious on their own but also can worsen chronic conditions, such as diabetes and arthritis, that many older people live with. In addition to caring for trauma patients from its 35-county East Texas catchment area, UT Health Tyler also receives seriously injured patients transferred from as far away as Amarillo, caring for patients from 52 Texas counties as well as neighboring Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

"Treating older patients with chronic conditions who experience a fall-related injury requires a specific skill set and set of resources to make sure they get the proper care...Without proper intervention, these individuals can go on to have compromised outcomes even if they don't appear at first to be seriously injured. That's the value of our Level I trauma center. We provide that level of expert care for older, rural East Texas residents close to home."

Dr. Alan Cook

Medical Director, Trauma Research Program
UT Tyler School of Medicine



"Our trauma center's reach goes well beyond our immediate regional footprint. We care for seriously injured patients from all corners of the state and even beyond."

Extending Trauma Care Capacity to Surrounding Hospitals

As part of a health system of nine hospitals serving a large geographic region, UT Health Tyler partnered with several of its system hospitals to develop transfer protocols both to support their ability to care for more patients with injuries and to preserve the capacity at the Level I trauma center for the most seriously and critically injured patients.

The transfer protocols provide clear direction and training to support local teams, including ER staff and inpatient hospitalist physicians, in managing more traumas locally. The goal is to be more thoughtful about each transfer decision while ensuring that every patient gets the level of care they need. With more judicious transfers, patients are spared the sizeable burden of transfer as well as separation from friends, family, and support systems, all the while receiving the care needed. The protocols ensure close remote surveillance by the Level I trauma team and the shared understanding that if anything changes with the patient's condition, the patient will be transferred promptly.

“For years, the practice was to transfer any patient with a brain injury, for example, no matter the severity, to the Level I trauma center. Now the CT scan technology is so sensitive that the radiologists can identify even trace of amounts of blood to determine risk to patients and make a more judicious transfer decision. The protocols UT Tyler and UT Health East Texas developed preserve the finite resources of the Level I trauma center while ensuring less severely injured patients get the level of care they need in their community hospital.”



Pioneering Research

In addition to its statewide clinical impact, UT Health Tyler serves as a vital clinical research site for the UT Tyler School of Medicine, leading to improvements in trauma care access, care delivery, and patient outcomes.

Traumatic injuries are the leading cause of death for those ages 1 – 44 and are the leading cause of injuries for all age groups. The impacts of traumatic injuries on individuals are significant with often lengthy hospitalization and rehabilitation, changes in employment status, family burden, and loss of productivity and incomes. The fiscal impact across the economy nationally is tens of trillions of dollars.

To advance trauma care response and effectiveness, UT Tyler School of Medicine researchers conduct independent research and collaborate with other University of Texas institutions on projects.

UT Tyler School of Medicine participates in the Trauma, Research and Combat Casualty Care Collaborative (TRC4), a research entity established in 2022 to address the critical need for improved trauma care to improve patient outcomes. The unique collaboration, established by the University of Texas Board of Regents and funded in part by the Texas Legislature, operates out of The University of Texas at San Antonio. TRC4 facilitates and funds basic, clinical, and translational research between UT institutions and the U.S. Department of Defense and the Defense Health Agency. The UT System Board of Regents approved initial funding of \$2.5 million in 2022, and the Texas Legislature has appropriated funds to the collaborative.

One UT Tyler grant-funded project, conducted in collaboration with UT San Antonio and UT Health San Antonio, assesses what happens before and after a hospital stay for an injured individual. UT Tyler School of Medicine’s team developed databases and analyzed the data, with other teams responsible for assessing the data with AI to determine if emergency medical transportation should stop at a local hospital for basic stabilization before arriving at a trauma center.

“The research and collaboration represent a significant opportunity to leverage data to enhance trauma care across Texas. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all trauma patients receive the best possible care, regardless of their location.”

The research funded by the TRC4 also supports preliminary data gathering, which helps facilitate applications to the U.S. Department of Defense for additional research funding.

The research findings generated at UT Health Tyler’s Trauma Center and UT Tyler’s Center for Clinical Research are helping to save lives for military personnel and civilians across Texas and the country.

THOT Members Supporting Strong Rural Healthcare



From trauma readiness and response and supporting ongoing clinical training and education to sharing resources and coordinating and collaborating to solve shared challenges, Teaching Hospitals of Texas members like UT Tyler and UT Health East Texas are instrumental to rural healthcare accessibility and rural hospital resilience.

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About THOT

Teaching Hospitals of Texas is the state’s principal voice and advocate for hospitals and health systems that teach, train, and mentor the next generation of physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. THOT members anchor the state’s trauma and disaster response infrastructure, provide world-class tertiary and community-based care, and support policies and funding to ensure healthcare access for all Texans.

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