



Texas HLA President's Message

As I reflect on this past year, it feels especially fitting that the theme of our conference held at University of North Texas Health Science Center on April 10, 2026, was Impact with Innovation: Transforming through Leadership, Technology, and Community Partnerships. That theme truly captured the work and focus of our organization this past year as we continued transforming through leadership growth and stronger community partnerships.

We kicked off the conference with a happy hour at Rodeo Goat for attendees and affiliates. It was wonderful to see so many new faces alongside longtime members enjoying time together, networking, and building new professional connections and partnerships.

Clayton Stewart, Vice President of the Texas Medical Association, opened the conference with an insightful review of the successes and challenges from the last legislative session. He shared that the focus areas for the upcoming 90th Legislative Session will include public health, women's health and Medicaid, workforce development, and patient safety.

Felixia Colon inspired attendees with her message that leaders today are required to innovate. She encouraged us to be decisive, adaptable, and intentional about embracing change in order to continue moving organizations forward.

John Henderson, CEO of Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals, reminded us of the critical role rural hospitals play within their communities. Through personal stories about his family and experiences doing missionary work with his parents, he shared valuable lessons on leadership, service, and community. He also highlighted how rural communities are thinking creatively to support and educate their young people for the future.

Jynjer Schultz illustrated the rapidly changing landscape of patient engagement and how patients increasingly rely on Google, AI tools, and online reviews when choosing healthcare providers. She also discussed how artificial intelligence accelerates decision-making and influencing patient perceptions in ways healthcare leaders must understand and prepare for.

Bert Witherspoon closed out the day with a message that continues to resonate deeply: "Policy does not implement itself. AI does not deploy itself. Rural systems do not stabilize themselves. Partnerships do not sustain themselves. People do."

As my year as President ends, I am confident in the future leadership of our organization. I leave you in the capable hands of our incoming board: Vivian Mitchell, President; Kimberly Kinkaid, President-Elect; Trisha Truxaw, Vice President; and Justin John, Secretary/Treasurer. They will meet in late June to begin shaping the vision and focus for the coming year.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve this incredible organization.

In Partnership,

Cassi Taylor

President, Healthcare Leaders Association of Texas



Cassi Taylor
HLA Texas President

HLA Texas 2026 Mixer - Rodeo Goat



HLA Texas 2026 Annual Conference Pictures

April 10, 2026

Innovation with impact: Transforming through
leadership, technology and community
partnerships

UNT Health
FORT WORTH

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TEXAS



HLA Texas 2026 Testimonials



Attending the Health Leaders Conference in Fort Worth this April was a valuable experience and provided an excellent opportunity to connect with healthcare professionals and industry leaders from across the region. Rural healthcare continues to present many unique challenges, and the speakers were engaging and provided meaningful insight into current issues affecting healthcare organizations and communities. The conference offered practical information on healthcare trends, reimbursement changes, leadership perspectives, and operational strategies that can help strengthen patient care and improve clinic efficiency. I am looking forward to seeing you all at next year's conference.

Dana Loomis - Graham Medical Associates

Many people who choose careers in healthcare are driven by a sincere desire to serve others. Yet the realities of today's healthcare environment can sometimes create challenges that make that sense of purpose feel dimmed. Even so, the commitment to serve is never lost—it simply needs opportunities to be renewed.

Attending the 2026 Healthcare Leaders Association of Texas Annual Conference was one of those opportunities for me. I am deeply grateful for the experience. The conference offered meaningful insights from speakers, engaging discussions on important topics, and valuable connections with fellow healthcare professionals.

Most importantly, the support and camaraderie of leaders from across healthcare—including operations, finance, and administration—stoked my passion for service. The experience served as a powerful reminder of the shared mission that unites us and the importance of continuing to lead with purpose, compassion, and commitment.

Demetris McDowell, MHA



HLA Texas 2026 Testimonials



On April 10th, I attended my first [Healthcare Leaders Association of Texas](#) Conference at [UNT Health Fort Worth](#). It was a great day filled with information, knowledge, networking, and connection! A huge thank you to Cassi Taylor and Tania Chevalier, CMPE for inviting me to attend.

The Healthcare Leaders Association of Texas (HLA Texas) hosts its Annual Conference in Fort Worth. The major event brings together healthcare administrators, medical practice leaders, and public health professionals alike. The conference highlights operational leadership, rural health sustainability, financial strategy, and the integration of AI in healthcare.

This year, we heard great speaker presentations from Bert Witherspoon, Jynjer Schultz, Felixia Colón, John Henderson, Clayton Stewart, and John Driscoll. I learned a lot about our current financial climate in healthcare and what we will need to do as we move forward.

Great seeing Justin John , Nancy Nikolovski, Barton Gill, Kimberly Kinkaid, Gretchen W. Collins, and getting to meet many more people passionate about improving healthcare as we move forward.

For more specific information regarding next year's dates or to view regional networking events in the Arlington/Fort Worth area, check the [HLA Texas](#) homepage. I look forward to attending this conference again next year. It is going to be worth the wait!

Tanya Stinson, LSSMBB, MCBA, CRP



How Communication Shapes the Patient Experience

The Patient Experience Starts Before the Exam Room

A five-star practice is not defined only by clinical outcomes. It is also defined by how consistently patients feel informed, respected, and supported throughout their care journey.

While physicians and providers deliver the clinical expertise, the patient experience is shaped just as much by the team members who support that care every day. Front desk staff, medical assistants, billing team members, and practice leaders all play a role in how patients experience the practice.

Communication is the bridge between clinical care and patient confidence.

For patients, the experience begins long before the provider enters the exam room. It starts with the first phone call, the first website inquiry, the first scheduling question, or the first conversation about insurance. The clarity, tone, and consistency of those early interactions shape what patients believe about the practice before they ever arrive.

Patients do not separate communication from care. From their perspective, how information is delivered is part of the treatment experience itself. Even a clinically excellent visit can feel frustrating if a patient leaves unsure about next steps, confused about coverage, or feeling dismissed by the support team.

Where Communication Gaps Commonly Occur

In medical practices, dissatisfaction does not always come from clinical decisions. More often, it comes from uncertainty.

Patients may be unclear about appointment logistics, referral requirements, prior authorization, insurance benefits, follow-up plans, test results, or financial responsibility. They may receive different answers to the same question depending on which team member they speak with.

These inconsistencies create frustration and slowly weaken trust.

Most communication gaps are not intentional. They happen in busy practices where support teams are answering phones, checking in patients, responding to portal messages, documenting information, handling insurance questions, and managing patient concerns, often all at the same time.

The problem is usually not a lack of effort. It is the absence of shared communication standards.

Communication Training Is a Leadership Responsibility

Practices that consistently deliver strong patient experiences treat communication as a leadership responsibility.

They do not assume staff will simply “pick it up” along the way. They educate their teams. They set clear expectations. They use shared language. They establish repeatable frameworks so patients receive consistent information regardless of who answers the phone, checks them in, or responds to their question.

This type of training teaches staff how to answer common patient questions, explain uncertainty, set expectations, manage delays, discuss insurance or authorization issues, and respond professionally when patients are upset.

When staff know what effective communication looks like, they feel more confident and less reactive. That confidence is immediately felt by patients.

A Simple Framework for Difficult Conversations

Support staff are often the first to receive patient frustration. Without structure, those conversations can feel personal, stressful, and emotionally draining.

How Communication Shapes the Patient Experience, cont'd.

One simple framework that practices can use is the LAST Model:

- Listen without interrupting.
- Apologize to acknowledge frustration without assigning blame.
- Solve by explaining the next step or available options.
- Thank the patient for their patience, feedback, or willingness to work through the issue.

Using a shared framework like LAST helps staff respond consistently, reduce escalation, and reinforce a respectful patient experience.

It also protects the team.

Many instances of burnout among front desk and clinical support staff are tied to repeated difficult conversations handled without enough training, language, or support. When staff are given a structure to follow, they are better equipped to stay calm, professional, and confident under pressure.

Consistency Is the Foundation of a Five-Star Practice

Consistency is the foundation of a five-star practice.

Patients do not expect perfection. They expect reliability.

They want to know what is happening, what to expect next, who will follow up, and how the practice will help them move forward. When communication is consistent across interactions, trust grows.

That trust matters.

Patients are more patient during delays when expectations have been set clearly. They are more understanding when challenges arise if they feel respected and informed. They are more likely to return, refer others, and leave positive reviews when the overall experience feels organized and professional.

Consistency also improves practice operations. Clear communication reduces repeat calls, misunderstandings, complaints, and escalations. It supports smoother workflows and creates a more stable environment for the entire team.

Why Investing in Staff Education Matters

Communication training is often overlooked because it does not always feel urgent.

But negative reviews, patient complaints, staff turnover, and daily frustration are often symptoms of deeper communication gaps.

Investing in staff education gives team members practical tools they can use every day. It helps create a shared standard for how patients are greeted, informed, supported, and guided through the care experience.

The need for clinical care may bring patients to a practice.

Communication often determines whether they stay, return, refer, and recommend.

A five-star patient experience is built one conversation at a time. When those conversations are intentional, **consistent**, and supported through staff education, excellence becomes more than an expectation.

It becomes the standard.

Tania Chevalier, CMPE, healthcare consultant, speaker, author, and founder of TurnKeyMD.

Upcoming Members Only Webinar

Healthcare Leaders Association of Texas offers a free webinar each month to state chapter members. These webinars are archived on our Webinar Page in the Members Only area for viewing on demand after the webinar as well.

June 9, 2026 / 12:00 - 1:00pm Central

ARE YOU OKAY? ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH

Gretchen Napier, MSHA, SHRM-SCP, FACMPE



About this Webinar:

We have learned from world-class athletes at the top of their games, like Naomi Osaka, Michael Phelps, and Simone Biles, how they must prioritize their mental, as well as physical health. Working in healthcare is a stressful environment on a good day. A leadership style that includes “put on your game face” and “tough it out” will struggle to meet the needs of their patients and the practice while also addressing the mental health needs of their employees. In this session, we focus on concrete strategies practice leaders can implement to make an immediate impact.

Objectives:

- Describe the factors bringing employee mental health to the forefront of HR discussions
- Identify strategies for improving individual mental health
- Develop practice-wide improvements for improving employee mental health

Meet our Presenter:

Gretchen Napier is a Medical Practice Consultant at SVMIC working with physician offices to maximize their human resources by creating cultures that are clear, kind, inclusive, and inspiring. She is certified with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) as a Senior Certified Professional and is a Fellow of the American College of Medical Practice Executives. She has been a healthcare leader for over 25 years. Gretchen earned a Bachelor's in Human and Organizational Development from Vanderbilt and a Master's in Healthcare Administration from UAB (University of Alabama at Birmingham).

Live webinars and our on-demand webinar library are a FREE benefit of HLA Texas Membership.

HLA Texas Members - How to register for this webinar.

SIGN IN to your Member Center on our website www.hlatexas.com using your HLA Texas username/password. The SIGN IN button is located on the top left of our webpage.

After you sign in to your Member Center, select the "Monthly Webinar Series." button for registration and access to the on-demand webinar library.

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THURSDAY
JUNE 11TH
2026

HCLQ TEXAS
FOUR SEASONS 1300
HOUSTON LAMAR ST.



AGENDA

QUORUM PROGRAM
CLICK HERE

THREE-PANEL AGENDA CLOSING RECEPTION
2:00-5:30 PM 5:30-7:00 PM

LEADING INSIGHTS | 45-MIN PANEL DISCUSSIONS | NETWORKING



We appreciate your mission and value your partnership with HCLQ.

As an **Affiliated Organization**, your Board Leadership, Committee Chairs, New Members – **and any other members who may benefit** – are offered a **complimentary** invite to join us at this year's Quorum.

REGISTER NOW
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COMP CODE **HLATX**

Some of Our Upcoming HCLQ Texas Speakers:



Greg Buehler
Chief Medical Officer
Harris Health



Curtis Donaldson
Exec. Director
Texas A&M University



Theresa Tran
Director
Houston Health Department



Bob Wilson
Co-Founder
Rural Healthcare Initiative



Timeka Walker
Chief Executive Officer
United Against Human Trafficking



Toby Hamilton
Founder & CEO
Hamilton Health Box



ABOUT OUR QUORUM

Our thoughtfully curated agenda creates a platform in which Healthcare Leaders can meet, exchange ideas, and promote progress within these significant topics.

QUORUM SPEAKERS
Past and Present

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PROMOTE Awareness.
Significant Issues | Leading Insights

MOTIVATE Change.
Engaging Discussions | Meaningful Outcomes



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MEMBER LISTSERV

HLA Texas is launching our new Listserv for our active members, this will be an exclusive platform where our active members can connect, collaborate and share real-time insights on healthcare leadership and management state wide.

This tool is designed to strengthen our professional network - making it easier than ever to exchange ideas, ask questions and stay informed on key issues impacting Texas Healthcare.

**Watch Your Email for Information
on How to Participate!**

www.hlatexas.com



- **Networking and peer support** - Connect with other healthcare leaders to discuss common challenges, share experiences, and receive candid advice.
- **Information sharing** - Share documents, policies, and other relevant information with a network of colleagues.
- **Question and answer forum** - Ask questions of colleagues and receive feedback on a wide range of topics.

Group Membership

Interested in your colleagues joining HLA Texas?

Medical practices that wish to purchase multiple Active memberships:

After 5 paid \$150 Active memberships, each additional membership from the same group is discounted to \$100. If your practice is interested in taking advantage of the discounted group membership, please contact us via email at: admin@hlatexas.com.



Healthcare Leaders Association of Texas champions excellence in healthcare leadership, providing resources and networking for professionals to improve care delivery and influence industry standards for a healthier tomorrow.

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