

## CASE STUDY

# The University of Texas Medical Branch Helps Patients Access and Afford Care Through Philanthropic Aid

## Patient Assistance Platform Unifies Cancer, Infusion and Specialty Pharmacy Service Lines

The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB Health) opened in 1891 as the nation's first public medical school and hospital under unified leadership. UTMB Health has evolved into a major academic health sciences center, world-renowned research enterprise and growing comprehensive health system with 13,000+ personnel and nearly 1,000 beds. The health system serves patients at four hospital campuses in Galveston, League City, Clearlake and Angleton Danbury and more than 90 primary care and specialty clinics across Southeast Texas. UTMB Health's mission is to improve health for the people of Texas and around the world by offering innovative education and training, pursuing cutting-edge research and providing the highest quality patient care.



## THE CHALLENGE

UTMB Health embraces a “Best Care” philosophy, which is a commitment to ensuring each patient receives the right care for the best possible results. This philosophy extends to its most vulnerable patients facing cancer and other complex diseases who lack insurance or are underinsured. These patients may be unable to afford care and often must decide if the impending medical debt is worth seeking treatment.

“In today’s economy, it is not just about access to healthcare, but can our patients afford their healthcare? We want to help our patients and reduce bad debt,” said Kathy Thomas, Director of Revenue Cycle Operations at UTMB Health. “Not only are drugs and chemotherapy treatments expensive, but patients face high costs for MRIs, CAT scans, surgeries, in-patient hospitalizations and more.”

Historically, UTMB Health has invested in charity care to address this challenge. They also began to explore philanthropic aid through patient assistance programs providing free drugs. This initiative was a manual, labor-intensive effort. The health system recognized there was much more they could do to help patients, but first had to overcome a series of challenges:

- Inability to effectively leverage patient assistance programs to ensure every possible patient receives care
- No patient co-pay assistance for encounters under the medical benefit or high-cost prescriptions
- Delivering co-pay assistance to patients under both the medical and specialty pharmacy benefit
- Inefficient, manual processes burdened staff and limited how many patients received aid
- Data in silos complicated efforts to identify funding opportunities and expedite enrollment
- Coordination challenges across patients, programs and multiple departments



## Summary

**265**

**PATIENTS AWARDED  
PHILANTHROPIC AID**

**\$2.9M**

**IN PATIENT FINANCIAL  
SUPPORT ANNUALLY**

**4%**

**REDUCTION IN BAD DEBT**

**1**

**PATIENT ASSISTANCE  
SOLUTION ACROSS MEDICAL  
AND SPECIALTY PHARMACY  
BENEFIT**

## THE SOLUTION

UTMB Health partnered with Atlas Health for a comprehensive AI-powered patient advocacy solution that would heighten their ability to leverage philanthropic aid. A combination of specialty pharmacy staff and patient advocates help match, enroll and collect from a database of thousands of patient assistance and social support programs. Interfaces between Atlas and UTMB Health's EHR and billing systems enable the automatic matching of patients to every potential opportunity for free drug, co-pay and diagnosis-based assistance across medical and specialty pharmacy benefits. Program applications are streamlined through digital data collection and secure patient text messaging. Worklists and alerts coordinate efficient enrollment, reimbursement and re-enrollment processes. Claims, orders, payments and drug awards are managed and monitored in one auditable enterprise platform with centralized reporting.

## THE RESULTS

UTMB Health's optimized patient assistance program has alleviated financial distress among patients so they can focus on getting better and living their lives.

**“ Our bills wouldn't have been taken care of without your help. We're extremely grateful the financial burden has been lifted. My wife is feeling much better after her treatment! She's up, and we're going back to church again. She does not even have to wear her wig anymore. I can't thank you enough.**

— Husband of UTMB patient diagnosed with breast cancer who faced a financial hardship of \$5,000 every 21 days for infusions

“It's stories like these that make me work hard every day for our patients,” said Brenda Smith, Patient Advocate at UTMB Health. “The patient's husband came in and showed me their bill, worried about how they were going to make their payments. We worked to enroll her in a patient assistance program, secured her award and coordinated with our billing team to have their prior bills adjusted retroactively as well. Her husband was so relieved the next time we spoke.”

“It’s fantastic to support our patients through co-pay assistance and free drugs for both upcoming treatments and outstanding balances,” said Kathy Thomas, Director of Revenue Cycle Operations at UTMB Health. “This program supports UTMB Health’s mission and vision to care for our patients and expand affordability to reduce their financial burden.”

In less than a year, UTMB Health has connected 265 patients through its expanded patient assistance program, helping them access and afford the healthcare they need. The health system is on track to support their patients with more than \$2.9M in philanthropic aid annually, representing 0.3% of NPR and a 4% reduction in bad debt.

“**Our patient assistance program is a great marriage between our specialty pharmacy, infusion center oncology operations and billing cycle teams. This drives real impact for our patients to cover their out-of-pocket costs when they have to make difficult decisions between their finances and medical care. It’s a huge help to improve patients’ lives and foster goodwill between UTMB Health and our community.**

— Zinkeng Asonganyi, PharmD, Director of Pharmacy-Ambulatory Operations at UTMB Health

## ABOUT ATLAS

Atlas Health automates philanthropic aid to improve access, affordability, outcomes and health equity for vulnerable populations. Through intelligent matching and enrollment to thousands of philanthropic aid programs, healthcare organizations can improve patient outcomes and reputation, increase cash and reduce staff administrative burden. Learn more at [Atlas.Health](https://atlas.health).



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