

# Miller's vision to improve hospitals guides company

By Jay Jones  
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CONYERS — Charles Miller of Signature Hospital Corp. said all hospitals need to look in the mirror when it comes to the current state of health care because they depend too much on price increases and forget about quality of service.

Talking to the Citizen on Thursday, Miller said he has developed a management philosophy from his more than 40 years in the hospital business, beginning as a patient admittance clerk at a veterans hospital in High Springs, Texas, when he was 18 years old. Miller said hospitals have depended too much on just increasing costs and less on finding ways to be more efficient or attracting patients.

“I can show you an organizational chart of a hospital from 1950 and one from today, and they would look the same,” Miller told the Conyers Rotary Club earlier Thursday.

He said he believed hospitals have failed to change with the times, which is part of the reason alternatives such as ambulatory surgery centers have taken patients away.

Ambulatory surgery centers are facilities operated by physicians who are licensed to only perform specialized procedures, such as a colonoscopy.

“(Hospitals) have priced themselves out of the market,” Miller said. “These ambulatory surgery centers started sucking out all of the business because the pricing was cheaper, when you went you were in and out, so it was convenient, and customer service was first-class. I finally went to one myself. We just missed the boat.”

Miller said quality is another major point for him, noting the best way to define quality is “the lack of defects.” He said mistakes made at hospitals are well-documented but are rarely discussed for fear of being sued or fired. He said Signature has a process to change that based on what Toyota did in their factories to ensure quality.

He described a process in which the lowest-level workers on Toyota's assembly lines have the ability to shut down the line whenever they see a mistake or a flaw in an automobile without fear of reprisal. Miller said he believed the same can take place in hospitals, including Rockdale Medical Center.

“It's kind of a safe-care mentality,” he said. “I always thought if you are in for some condition, we may or may not be able to cure you totally, but, by God, the least we ought to be able to do is not hurt you when you're in the ... hospital. It's our job.”

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