

Concierge Medicine – The Future of Health Care

Have you ever sat in a crowded clinic waiting room well past your appointment time -- an appointment you made two months in advance because the receptionist said that was the earliest available date? And after you finally get called to the back, you end up waiting even longer in the examination room before the doctor gets in to see you. When he finally shows up, he seems rushed and anxious, spending less than 15 minutes with you.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that it's not entirely the doctor's fault. With rapidly declining reimbursements for primary care services by managed care and mounting requirements of new non-paid administrative duties, primary care physicians are at a tipping point. They don't see their practices as profitable unless they see a large volume of patients for very brief office visits. Patients frequently feel their medical needs are ignored because doctors rarely have time to counsel them or answer and discuss other important health questions.

The typical busy urban physician can see anywhere from 5,000 to 8,000 patients annually. This works out to 20 or 30 patients in an eight- or ten-hour day. How could he or she possibly spend more than 10 or 15 minutes (and sometimes less) with each patient?

House Calls and the Good Old Days

Regardless of where the blame is placed, you deserve better than the robotic, hurried, impersonal care that many busy clinical practices provide. Perhaps you long for the good old days you heard your father talking about. You know, those days when the doctor made a house call when a family member got sick. The doctor knew each family member by name and delivered compassionate personalized care. Are we now doomed to the waiting and the rushing and complicated insurance stipulations and copays of today?

"How much of human life is lost in waiting!" lamented Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay, *Prudence*, published in 1841.

Concierge Medicine – Lighting the Way Back

The term concierge medicine refers to a growing trend in healthcare that addresses much of the dysfunction associated with heavily burdened, managed care medical practices. Also known as "boutique medicine", this fast growing business model requires that patients pay an annual retainer, or fee. This fee covers all aspects of a patient's primary healthcare needs with no additional cost. Depending on the area of the country, the annual fees can range anywhere from \$2,500 to \$10,000.

I spoke to [Dr. Richard Kravis](#), an internal medicine specialist with his own exclusive concierge practice in Naples, Florida, and asked him to explain the benefits of this health care model. "One of the most obvious benefits," he explains, "is that concierge physicians limit the number of patients they see, somewhere between 200 and 800

annually, greatly reducing overall case load and allowing them to spend more personal time with patients." Patients also enjoy same-day appointments with no more wasted time in waiting rooms full of others doing the same. "I actually know my patients by name and don't flinch when ordering numerous preventive health screening tests. Patients have access to me 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can call me directly," Kravis says.

Here are just a few of the benefits of using a concierge physician like Dr. Kravis:

- Visits to your office, home, or hospital
- Access to the doctor 24 hours, 7 days a week
- Same day visits, no waiting
- Customized health assessment and lifestyle plans
- Comprehensive preventative testing
- On-site diagnostic tests
- Staff arranges appointments for specialist visits
- Curbside transportation service when necessary
- Coordinated care at your second residence or during travel
- Coordinated care with local, regional, and out-of-state physicians
- Wellness and preventative care recommendations

One problem that occurs in traditional health care settings is that a patient's physician might not follow him or her at the hospital. In other words, other doctors will take care of the patient at the hospital and there's little to know communication with the primary care physician during the inpatient stay, Kravis told me. This creates a great disconnect in the continuity of the patient's health care.

"We still follow patients at the hospital. We follow them from start to finish and work closely with any specialists or other staff involved in their care," he continued. "A true concierge physician will follow his patients and make house calls."

Many of Dr. Kravis' patients are only in Naples for about half the year and live up north for the remainder. He continues to closely monitor the health of his patients during their time away from his local practice. He does this by coordinating care with physicians and health care institutions located in close proximity to his patients' second homes.

"When people travel outside the US and run into a medical issue, it's problematic if they don't have access to their medical records," Kravis warns. "We provide our patients with a secure, encrypted keyfob that contains all of their medical records that they carry on a keychain."

What To Look For in a Concierge Physician Practice

I asked Dr. Kravis to talk a little bit about what people should look for when shopping for a concierge physician. Here are the main things to look for at first glance (before going over all the other benefits the doctor may offer):

1. Make sure the doctor is board certified. This is required for privileges at most hospitals anyway.
2. Ask him or her about the hospital where they have privileges. Is it the same one you prefer?
3. Will the doctor expedite your care in the emergency room and follow you throughout your hospital stay with personal visits and by communicating with other staff involved in your care?
4. Does the doctor make house calls and give you direct access to him at all times?
5. Will you have immediate access to your electronic medical records wherever you are?

This fast growing type of medical practice has the potential to shift the way people think of their health care and their providers. The concept of a single annual fee that encompasses all aspects of primary care, including any necessary diagnostics tests and other procedures is one of the most appealing things about it. It reminds me a little of the Wheaton Wealth Partners fee-only model. We charge one annual fee for our financial planning services and provide a similar type of personalized services to clients. I think the fee-only model, whether it's in a medical practice or financial planning firm, builds a strong trust relationship between provider and client. Trust – it's the foundation to a wonderful future.

About Dr. Richard Kravis: *Dr. Kravis is Board Certified in Internal Medicine, Quality Assurance, Integrative Holistic Medicine, and Anti-Aging and Regenerative Medicine. He has been treating concierge patients in the Naples, Florida area since 2002. You can reach Dr. Kravis at 239-262-6005 or visit his website at www.KravisMD.com.*