



Concierge Health Care

Shorter waits, greater access, and more time with your doctor are just some of the benefits of concierge medicine.

TIRED OF WAITING WEEKS TO GET an appointment with your primary care physician? Frustrated by crowded waiting rooms, rushed office visits, and preoccupied providers? If so, you may want to consider getting your medical care from a physician who provides what's known as "concierge medicine."

Concierge medical providers typically charge patients a fee in addition to the cost of medical services. These fees free them to have fewer patients — typical family physicians

may have an average of 5,000 patients; concierge physicians usually limit their practices to several hundred patients.

With fewer patients, concierge physicians can spend more time with each patient. In a typical primary care practice, appointments last an average of about seven minutes, according to Gary Price, M.D., President of the American Academy of Private Physicians. In a concierge physician's office, visits run 30 minutes or longer.

Other benefits may include same-

day or next-day office appointments, shorter wait times, and personal access to your doctor by mobile phone, text, and email. "We get involved in people's lives," Dr. Price says.

It is estimated that there are between 1,000 and 5,000 concierge practices in the United States today. To locate one in your area, use the physician-finder tool on the American Academy of Private Physicians website: aapp.org. ■

— ALICE LESCH KELLY

How Concierge Medicine Works

Most concierge practices are set up in one of three ways, says Dr. Gary Price:

The "retainer" or "annual fee" model: A patient pays a fee ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 a year, in addition to all normal charges for

exams, tests, and procedures. Doctors using this model often don't accept health insurance; however, patients can pay upfront and then submit bills to their insurers for reimbursement.

The "hybrid" model: A patient pays an average yearly fee of \$1,500 to \$1,800 plus medical fees, and health insurance is usually accepted. Any

costs not covered by insurance must be paid by the patient.

The "fee for service" or "a la carte" model: Patients pay as they go, paying several hundred dollars for each visit in addition to charges for exams, tests, and procedures. A la carte concierge physicians sometimes accept health insurance. — A.L.K.