



The Doctor Is In — at 4 a.m.!

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It's 4 a.m. You're doubled over with excruciating pain, but refuse to bother the doctor. So, you suffer.

Well, not anymore! Thanks to a revolutionary concept in medical care, you can call the doctor 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Without guilt!

If you're too ill to schlep to his office, he'll drive to your house. Or call you from Europe. Or accompany you to the E.R.

He'll even coordinate specialist visits, and provide you with his cell, home phone number and e-mail address.

Welcome to the world of "boutique" medicine, or "concierge" practices.

But there's a price to pay.

"Each patient pays \$2,000 a year," says Dr. Robert Weiss of Total Access Medical, LLC, in Bala Cynwyd. "That's \$4,000 per couple, plus my patients retain their medical insurance, pharmacy and hospitalization plans. But I see them any time, day or night, and spend at least an hour or more with them. I'm always accessible."

For Weiss, who sees married couples, singles, widows and widowers from all walks of life, it translates to being available on vacations and holidays.

"I'm always on call," he says, noting that by year's end he'll probably have another Philadelphia physician on board.

“Even on vacation, my patients know that I’m never out of contact. In fact, they want me to relax and have time off so I don’t burn out, causing them to lose the availability to continue [my] offering this service.”

While \$2,000 per person — and \$1,000 for kids between the ages of 15 and 21 — might sound like a hefty price, ponder this: Doctors in Florida charge up to \$20,000 a year for the same deluxe treatment. According to documented information, approximately 200 national doctors offer this new service.

A competitor, MDVIP, based in Boca Raton, Fla., is negotiating with a Cherry Hill, N.J., doctor to open a “boutique” practice in Monmouth County, N.J.

And, for those who desire this elegant form of care but can’t pay upfront, Weiss offers a solution: “We arrange financing at preferred borrowing rates with a local bank. Among my patients are retired postal workers, railroad employees, manicurists, ex-school teachers and others.”

According to Weiss, this is just a solution to the current marketplace, primary-care problem that exists in Philadelphia. Weiss says that primary care has turned itself into a supermarket mentality of high volume. Most patients spend seven minutes with a doctor. By allowing an hour or more, his patients receive more inclusive care.

“In my opinion, I’m offering a suitable alternative,” he says. “I don’t believe it’s the overall solution to the problems of American health care. But the fact that people would spend even more money makes a major statement.

“My ability to do this is a direct reflection of symptoms that exist in health care.”

Ann and Richard Frankel of Gladwynne are longtime patients of Dr. Weiss. They now pay the extra fee for superior service.

“We stayed with him because the quality care he provides is extraordinary,” says Ann Frankel. “He’s extremely bright, devoted and attentive. Even years ago, before he changed to ‘boutique’ care, he’d call us late at night with test results.

“We’re paying for immediate and unlimited access, and knowing that wherever we are, he’s there, too. He reviews reports from my specialists, makes decisions and coordinates my care. He understands the whole picture. I recently called him from California in the middle of the night. I never think twice about calling.”

Total Access Medical, LLC, the management company with a full-service membership program designed to work in conjunction with your traditional health plan, states it combines modern medicine with old-fashioned care.

“Our basic concept is that normal general physicians in this area have between 2,000 and 4,000 patients,” explains Richard Stamps, president of Total Access Medical, LLC. “In our program, they’re required to limit themselves to 600 patients. We’re also negotiating with other physicians.

“We’re not sure how many we’ll have because we’re searching for the best. This allows our patients to experience unheard of levels of service.”

However, a swirl of controversy surrounds the concept with questions being raised if it’s economically fair. Would the affluent have access to better medical care than the poor? And not all doctors even agree with the theory.

Dr. Ronald B. Frank from North Penn Family Medicine in Lansdale and Chalfont, enjoys treating a variety of patients from different social and economic stations.

“I provide the best service and care to all patients,” he says. “Their insurance policy — or whether or not they have one — is irrelevant. To me, private family medicine is similar to going in each day, visiting with friends and helping them with problems.

“If their financial situation changed, it wouldn’t affect our doctor-patient relationship. However, the reality of practicing as a ‘boutique’ doctor may be different than my perception of it.”