



The Future of Primary Care?

“Going to the doctor” will be a different experience in the future. *Health Elevations*’ experts in the field share their prognostications about what primary care may look like as it evolves to an integrated, team-based approach.

Hello, Doctor?

“For openers, most of health care you get will not involve going to the doctor,” predicts Frank Verloin deGruy III, MD, chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine. He says studies already have shown that about half of what we go to the primary care doctor for can be handled by phone calls, emails or other private electronic communications on a secure Internet portal that your provider monitors. You will also likely receive more electronic reminders of needed follow-up care or just an occasional “How are you doing?”

Custom-made Care

Practitioners will spend more time assessing the health needs of people in their care and determining how to tackle those needs outside of office visits, says Mark Earnest, MD, PhD, director of Interprofessional Education and associate professor of General Medicine at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. Thanks to evolving technology, practitioners will be able to target people with information specific to their health considerations and cultural values. (For example, women receive information differently than men, and providers must understand that to effectively communicate, he says.)

Do It Yourself

“We’ve so neglected the role of a person in managing his or her own health,” deGruy says. He cites studies in Great Britain that show people can self-adjust dosages of prescribed medications effectively – while still checking in with their providers by phone or email. He sees a trend that will allow more people to check

blood pressures, monitor chronic diseases, adjust their diets and take other simple steps to assure health independently.

Yay, Team!

If you are not already, you will be seeing teams composed of different kinds of providers when you do require an office visit. Providers will run the range from medical doctors to nurses to patient educators to care managers, each providing the type and degree of care he or she is trained to give.

“You’ll experience care as a team effort with somebody on the front end coordinating it all and making sure your preferences are honored,” deGruy says. He believes that health care, health education and health promotion are “going to be mixed up in ways we can’t predict.”

Group Health Hug

Not only will more primary health care be given by nonphysician providers such as nurse practitioners or physician assistants, but people will learn about their medical conditions from peers, perhaps in a group setting. Earnest says this approach already has proved effective in helping people get their diabetes under control or have a healthy pregnancy by meeting with and learning from others about what has worked.

At Your Convenience

Earnest says more providers are questioning how to better serve the people in their care. “A lot of us are looking at these banker’s hours we keep and wondering if we are really meeting patients’ needs that way,” he says. “Should we open on Saturday mornings or stay open weekdays until 7 p.m.?”

