



Letters to the editor

Reject impersonal MinuteClinics

01:00 AM EST on Sunday, March 4, 2007

I found your Feb. 27 editorial "Handy local clinics" extolling the virtues of retail-based medical clinics (such as MinuteClinics) ironic, since I read it late that night after I got home following my evening office hours, when I see patients who are unable to come to the office during regular business hours.

I have worked on Tuesday evenings for the past 17 years, and while my patients can't just walk into my office while buying deodorant or toothpaste, as they can at CVS, they get something that I believe is well worth the minor inconvenience of making an appointment when they come to see me in my office on Tuesday night.

For example, I can remind the 46 year-old woman who comes in for a sinus infection that she is overdue for her mammogram. Or I can ask my diabetic with a sore throat how he's doing with his blood sugars and adjust his treatment if he's not doing as well as he should at the same time that I treat the sore throat. How about that 70-year-old with a cough who's on 10 different medications and has been under my care for 15 years? Where will that patient get better care for that "minor problem," as the editorial describes it: in a clinic in the middle of a drugstore or at his medical home (i.e., his personal physician's office)?

In reality, the cost of care in a retail-based clinic is not much less than the cost of treating the same problem in a physician's office. But no matter how much less the clinics cost, the above examples beg the question of whether the true value of care in these clinics is as great as the editorial suggests. The proliferation of retail-based clinics is yet another bandage that covers the bigger issue, which is that the delivery system and the payment system need to be fixed.

Instead of supporting the further fragmentation and depersonalization of health care, The Journal should be promoting the ability of patients to get their care from a personal physician with whom they have an established long-term relationship, not from an anonymous provider in a booth in a pharmacy or discount department store.

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