

Concierge Medicine

The field of concierge medicine, also known as retainer medicine and boutique practice, is coming up on its tenth anniversary. Begun in 1996 in Seattle, the creation of MD2 kicked off the provision of the type of high-touch medical service that had previously only been enjoyed by athletes, dignitaries and entertainers. The hallmarks of concierge medicine since then have been limited numbers of patients per doctor combined with house visits, longer appointments and the type of care that had been banished from the field of medicine by drastic cost control measures. Many doctors who have chosen the route of concierge medicine have done so for the quality of their lives as well as that of their patients. By limiting the number of patients they serve through the concierge medicine structure, they are able to provide the time and attention they always expected they would when they chose medicine as their profession. Today, most states have a variety of forms of this type of practice, from single doctor offices to groups of doctors who have banded together to provide concierge medicine style services to their patients.

Any doctor who moves to a concierge medicine structure for his business however, has to go through some difficult procedures and has to be mindful of significant legislation bounding the provision of medical services. Since concierge medicine is predicated on serving a smaller client base, a doctor must first notify all his or her patients of plans to pare down and move to an annual fee-based service. Not all patients can afford or believe in this type of medical service. Next, the doctor must be very careful that they are not “double billing” for those services judged to be covered by Medicare. This can include care for optimum health or health assessment procedures. Some concierge practices have received unwelcome attention from Congress, as their annual fees were seen as illegal overcharges to the patient.

What is the difference between healthcare advocacy firms like PinnacleCare and concierge medical practices?

It's important to understand that patient healthcare advocacy firms differ from concierge medicine practices in a number of ways. First and foremost, concierge medical practices practice medicine. They are primary-care practices that provide care to a limited number of patients for an annual fee. Referrals, when needed, typically are limited to the doctors' personal referral network. Also, concierge medicine services, by necessity, tend to be confined to a specific geographical location.

Patient advocacy and healthcare advocacy firms such as PinnacleCare International not provide medical care but do provide healthcare management. PinnacleCare is staffed by former health-care administrators, nurses, social workers, etc., who manage all aspects of the health affairs of its Member families. This includes researching medical centers, doctors and treatment options; arranging for timely access to top physicians; handling all details related to appointment scheduling; organizing the Members' medical records and history; providing global resources on a 24/7 basis; and, in general, advocating

what's best for each and every Member. Some of PinnacleCare's Members are clients of concierge medicine practices. In these situations, the doctor works in conjunction with PinnacleCare to make sure their mutual clients receive the very best care possible.