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Concierge medicine an emerging option in health-care reform era

BY MATT HOLLIS

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Baytonian Carol Brown said that without being on a concierge medicine program, her mother, Billie Blythe, might have faced a much more serious health crisis.

Her 84-year-old mother had just got out of the hospital with a urinary tract infection when she became ill.

Although they did call an ambulance immediately, they were also able to call their doctor, even though it was past normal business hours. Their doctor, Dr. Kory Guidry, was able to calm them down and instruct them on what to do. Blythe was taken to the hospital and fully recovered.

"It made a doctor available when we need one," Brown said. "It is just handy."

Concierge medicine is a medical concept that more doctors are starting to use, including Dr. Guidry, who has a practice on 1010 West Baker Road.

He began offering a hybrid version of the service in January, and both he and his patients have given the program high marks.

Guidry explained that with the concierge medicine service, patients pay a flat rate of about \$150 a month to have increased accessibility to the physician and services.

"They are able to talk to a live person 24/7," Guidry said. "If they have any issues that occur after 5 o'clock, then they can speak to me directly."

Guidry said that another benefit is the ability to offer "old medicine."

"In this day and age, an office visit is about 15 minutes. About two-thirds of our day is spent looking at a computer or completing paper-

work," Guidry said. "We only have one-third of the opportunity to interact with our patients. There is no way I can share the information of my medical history or complaints within 15 minutes. With a concierge visit, the visit is anywhere from 30 minutes to a full hour. It is a face-to-face, hands-on visit where the patient can convey their medical history and the doctor can listen actively to the patient and basically come up with a good plan to address their overall health or specific medical problem."

Patients are responding to it well, according to Guidry. Brown said she could corroborate the doctor's belief.

"I had sclerosis surgery in 2005, so I am on a pain management program," she said.

"So, I have to make sure I am close enough with my doctor to discuss pain treatments, and with Dr. Guidry, I can just call him up and say I need prescriptions refilled or talk to him. He is just a real personable doctor."

Guidry said that the program gives patients the freedom of being able to get in to see the doctor when they can.

"A lot of millennials with parents with chronic health issues enjoy it," he said.

"They can make a call and get their parent in without having to rush them to the emergency room for a simple problem or urgent care. For people who have these chronic diseases, this is ideal."

Guidry's offers a program called Concierge Choice, a hybrid version where patients can choose to be on it if they wish.

"With the average concierge program that came out, the doctor



DR. GUIDRY



DR. LIPTON

accepted 200 to 300 patients, and that was if the practice was close," Guidry said. "With this program, you do not abandon your patients. They have the options to do it, pay for those services through the program that the insurance companies don't cover, or the option not to do it. That is what I like about it. I actively take care of about 4,000 patients. There is no way I would just say I would only take care of only a certain 200 to 300 and the rest can just get by. I have that opportunity, and the patients have the choice to choose to do it. Those that do really enjoy it and appreciate it."

Wayne Lipton is the inventor of the concierge hybrid model. He is the founder and managing partner of Concierge Choice Physicians.

"The concierge model is a great way for a doctor to afford to spend with each patient," Lipton said. "It changes the kind of service they offer so they are no longer like a repair person. They are a counselor, an advocate and adviser as well as a provider of medical care."

Lipton said patients can see an improvement in their health thanks to the relationship concierge medicine builds between them and their doctors.

"I think it helps people become more proactive themselves," Lipton said. "On every team, you need a quarterback, and they need them to

help them figure things out. There are a lot of decisions to make, and sometimes you get many opinions. Not only can the doctor and patient be proactive and work on preventive care, but can also help manage situations they have already more effectively. It is a way to get the most out of what the doctor can do for you. In that respect, it can be helpful to people's health."

Some additional services come along with the program that insurances usually do not cover such as cosmetic surgery.

But the relationship a patient and doctor can build with the service is one of its biggest appeals.

"There is no way that you can really take care of someone effectively and listen to them in 15 minutes," Guidry said. "(Concierge medicine) is more thorough. They have more time to explain their symptoms. The whole point is to listen and interpret, not to rush to do certain tests that may not be indicative at all."

Guidry added that millennials could benefit from the program since they can take a USB card with them when they travel and see a doctor in a network set up around the country.

Lipton said he sees the program expanding outside of the United States and growing immensely with the next five or so years.

"I think we will see more and more doctors doing this," he said. "One thing it is all about- the relationship between a patient with their doctor. If you have to pick a word that speaks to what concierge is about, that word is 'relationships.'"

To find out more about Lipton's hybrid concierge service, or to find a doctor that offers the service, visit www.choice.md.