

# TOTAL ACCESS: CONCIERGE MEDICINE PUTS A NEW SPIN ON HEALTH CARE

*Some doctors still make house calls.*



## A NEW MODEL FOR HEALTH CARE

Imagine breezing into your doctor's office for a checkup without killing twenty minutes in the waiting room. Or calling your physician by cell phone day or night—and getting a response.

Highly personalized health care may seem like a fantasy, but for those who can afford it, it's within reach, thanks to the advent of concierge medicine. Initially conceived in 1996, and still a relatively small movement—there are an estimated 5,000 concierge practitioners nationwide—concierge medicine is slowly winning over patients and physicians looking for alternatives to standard managed-care options.

Patients contract directly with a concierge doctor to receive optimal health care, more face time, and 24/7 access while physicians limit the number of their patients to offer more personalized attention. Ultimately, concierge medicine puts the focus back on the doctor-patient relationship.

## A CHARACTER STUDY

In USA Network's new hour-long series, "Royal Pains," the world of concierge doctors and the individuals they care for moves into full view. The backdrop: the Hamptons, the beachside enclave on the east end of Long Island, New York—home to both

wealthy weekenders and year-round locals.

The main character of "Royal Pains," Dr. Hank Lawson (Mark Feuerstein), comes to concierge medicine more by circumstance than choice. Following an ethical but inopportune decision in the ER, Hank is fired from his promising job at a prominent New York City hospital. The young, talented doctor's life unravels. His brother Evan (Paulo Costanzo) eventually convinces the good doctor that a weekend in the Hamptons may be the cure for what ails him.

Just as circumstance played a role in the undoing of his career, the pendulum swings back in his favor as a chance incident permanently alters his life's course. After the brothers attend an estate party hosted by the wealthy Boris (Campbell Scott), Hank makes a lifesaving diagnosis when a guest requires urgent medical attention. Word spreads and, overnight, he becomes the town's concierge doctor.

Hank's career rebounds. He not only serves the Hamptons' social set, but locals, too. Aided by the ambitious beauty Divya (Reshma Shetty), Hank acclimates to his new surroundings. The transition is further eased after the local hospital administrator Jill (Jill Flint) opens a free clinic, lending Hank another outlet for his real calling: giving compassionate care to those in need.

## THE PRACTITIONERS' VIEWPOINT



### TUCSON PIONEER

#### STEVEN D. KNOPE, M.D.

Dr. Steven D. Knope, a board-certified internist, sports medicine expert, four-time Ironman triathlete, and author of the pioneering book "Concierge Medicine: A New System to Get

the Best Healthcare" (Greenwood/Praeger, 2008), sees concierge medicine as a return to the good old days, when people paid for office visits and "didn't have a third-party payer or Medicare imposing itself between the doctor and his relationships."

Since starting his concierge practice in Tucson, Arizona, eight years ago, this early adopter has built it up from four patients to 150. "A lot of people say it's elitist, but I spent a good decade of my life as chief of medicine fighting the good fight," says Dr. Knope.

In addition, he takes care of about 100 indigent patients and does work for former servicemen, gratis. "I have a very hybrid practice," he explains. "The way I view it, the folks in the concierge program subsidize great care for patients who couldn't otherwise afford it."

Dr. Knope's concierge patients pay a one-time annual retainer fee (\$6,000 for individuals; \$10,000 for couples) that includes everything from "true health care optimization to ICU care for medical catastrophes" to house calls, 24/7 access, same-day appointments, and hospital admittance by the physician. They also receive a two-hour physical, nutritional analysis with an on-staff dietician, and fitness analysis with a personal trainer in his in-office gym.

Happily, no day is ever the same at his office. "I find this to be a very rewarding way to practice, building relationships with my patients."



### LOS ANGELES' LEADING LIGHT

#### RAPHAEL DARVISH, M.D., M.B.A.

"This practice was started to get back to that old-fashioned patient-doctor relationship," says Dr. Raphael Darvish, a fourth-generation physician

and medical director of Concierge Medicine/LA in the Brentwood area of Los Angeles. Growing up, he would hear his grandfather, father, and uncle, all doctors, discuss the lack of time they had for their patients—and how much better it had once been prior to managed care. "When I finished my training, I felt that there was a niche available on the Westside of L.A.," says Dr. Darvish. Concierge Medicine/LA has three physicians, including his father, Dr. Maurice Darvish, and about 1,000 patients. Some

individuals just purchase the annual presidential physical, which mirrors the comprehensive examination that the U.S. President receives, tweaked to their needs, while others opt for an annual membership, paying a flat fee ranging from \$1,750 to \$10,000, depending on age, which includes the presidential exam.

Dr. Darvish says that not all of his patients are wealthy—some are health-conscious, while others don't want the headache of H.M.O.s. "With the membership, they get full-on, 24/7 access to their physician: my cell phone number, no waiting, same-day appointments. We have the best of the best referral network if they need to see a specialist, and they get multi-physician meetings," he explains.

"In my eyes, concierge medicine is not that innovative," says Dr. Darvish. "It's doing something at a slow pace and just making sure that everything is perfect."



### HAMPTONS HERO

#### HANK LAWSON, M.D.

Although fictional, Hank offers insight into the new world of concierge care. Whether he's racing to save the life of an urban teenager or the son of a well-to-do Hamptonite, he

always puts the needs of his patients above all else.

Unmotivated by money, impervious to power or prestige, the lead character in USA Network's "Royal Pains" is a confident, quick-witted man in his mid-thirties who cares deeply and passionately about his chosen profession. Even when faced with deep-pocketed patients who offer him cash—or bars of gold—

Hank strives to take the moral high road. And he succeeds.

The realization that he was able to help so many patients in short order following his Hamptons arrival—and unwavering persuasion by his brother—convinces Hank that he might be needed in the East End. And so begins the story of the Hamptons' latest medical practice: HankMed.

But for Hank, making the switch from a traditional practice to a concierge doctor entails more than just switching Zip Codes. He must also adjust to the patients at hand. And once he meets the local hospital administrator, Jill, who is equally as principled, Hank realizes that he may have a chance to serve not only the rich, but patients of varying social strata in Long Island's most vibrant beachside community.