

Medicine Shoppe pharmacies and Corner Care clinics are open six days per week during the same business hours.

"You actually have to walk through our front doors (of the pharmacy) to get to the clinic," comments Julie Akra, owner of the Medicine Shoppe in Greensburg and a pharmacist. "It's convenient for a patient because they can get their prescription filled right after they leave the clinic."

"We have the same nurse practitioner at the location so she can develop relationships with people," Akra adds. "It's been great because she's been able to collaborate with me about different medications that are cost effective and better suited for the patients."

Physician perspective

Medical practitioners are divided in their assessment of retail clinics' value. Some doctors maintain that the clinics discourage individuals from establishing a medical home, while others maintain that they help increase their patient base.

"I don't think it's (the retail clinic approach) part of the problem," stresses Dr. Vidya Kora, who practices internal medicine at Franklin Clinic in Michigan City and is president of the Indiana State Medical Association, "but I don't see it as part of the solution either. Individuals need to have a medical home and that medical home is their family physician. If people want to go to a pharmacy or shopping mall for their care – for the sake of convenience – it's (better) than not getting any care, but I don't feel it is the most optimal care."

"It's no disrespect to the people who work there," he emphasizes. "It's a piece-meal approach to medicine. Especially if someone has chronic health problems, going to a retail clinic can be more dangerous because it can give them a false sense of security that (their health care needs have been met because) they have seen someone."

Corner Care values the concept of a medical home and clinic/physician partnerships.

"About 60% of the people who come to the clinics don't have a primary care doctor," Beckner reports. "We've created a referral process to physicians in our community that are accepting new patients. We really want that relationship to be very strong with physicians in the area."

Like Corner Care, MEDPOINTE express clinics encourage



MEDPOINTE express clinics, like this one in Plymouth, offer 15-minute patient visits.

patients to establish a medical home. "Our intent is not to work in competition with physicians, but to work in partnership with physicians," O'Neil stresses. "We're a firm believer in the medical home model. We are not there to be their ongoing primary care provider. We try to connect them to a physician and educate them on the (importance) of maintaining a relationship with a physician to ensure that they have continuity of care."

Business impact

Retail clinics can not only improve patients' health, but have certain financial advantages. Some insurance providers waive co-pays. Further, overhead fees are lower at retail care clinics.

"Because it's (the clinic) staffed by a nurse practitioner, it's more cost effective," Akra says. "Insurance (companies) will sometimes prefer nurse practitioners because physician visits can be more expensive."

"Ninety-nine percent of the people who are seen in the clinic and get prescriptions have them filled at the pharmacy," she points out, "so we've gotten a lot of new patients and that encourages them to walk through our door and see what we have to offer."

Beckner observes, "We preferred a pharmacy partner because they're already a health care destination, and the pharmacy owners are trusted medical advisors to their community."

O'Neil agrees that the clinics can lower health care costs. "The cost for a typical MEDPOINTE express convenient care visit is approximately \$50," he remarks. "That compares to a family physician visit which can be from \$75-\$100, and urgent care (ranging from) \$125-\$150, so it's less expensive for the insurance company and less expensive for the patient."

(BizVoice® calls to several insurance providers for comment were not returned).

Businesses hosting the clinics also benefit in other ways. In addition to filling their prescriptions at the

pharmacies, many patients purchase over-the-counter remedies and other non-medical items that further increase revenue.

Treating the problem

"If people are having difficulty accessing ideal care," Kora remarks, "we need to ask ourselves why it is that we do not have a system where people can have a medical home and what can



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– Dr. Vidya Kora



Corner Care Clinics are an integral component of the pharmacies that house them.

we do to create a system like that.

“We (medical practitioners sharing Kora’s perspective) applaud anyone who wants to improve access to health care for our patients,” he states, “but are retail health clinics the answer to the problem of access to quality health care? The answer is ‘no.’ ”

According to Beckner, part of the solution is stronger collaboration between hospital emergency room management and retail care clinics. She notes that a number of individuals visiting emergency rooms don’t have acute conditions and would be better served at a convenient care clinic.

Beyond convenience, she argues that the unnecessary emergency room visits “are costing everyone in the (health care) cycle a large amount of money. Establishing the relationship between clinics and emergency rooms would help with cost containment.”

Beckner also addresses how primary care physicians’ caseloads often become overloaded with minor care issues. She points out that doctors can devote more time to patients with serious health concerns if patients with minor illnesses seek care at retail clinics.

What is the prognosis for retail health care?

“I think the successful clinic operators will continue to evolve and provide increased services to patients based upon what patients need and ask for,” O’Neil predicts. “Those that adapt to the market will be successful.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: MEDPOINT express at www.medpointexpress.com

Corner Care Clinic at www.cornercareclinic.com

Julie Akra, Medicine Shoppe, at (812) 662-8550

Vidya Kora, Indiana State Medical Association, at (219) 874-3313

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