

Outside the Hospital

The Delivery of Health Care in Non-Hospital Settings

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After receiving (in the words of his father) “more degrees than a thermometer,” Don spent 20 years managing healthcare organizations, including being the CEO of a regional medical center in Texas. He also practiced law in Texas and Oklahoma, generally as counsel to healthcare professionals, and was a professor at two major universities, teaching graduate courses in healthcare economics, health law, bioethics, and strategic planning.

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POLLY GRIFFIN

Polly is a gifted and dedicated researcher to whom much of this work should be credited.

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Introduction

Health care in America is at a crossroads. As I write in early 2008, Democrats are leaning toward a universal healthcare system, Republicans toward individual assistance through tax credits or health savings accounts. Both parties agree that health spending is out of hand, care is not delivered to everyone, and something must be done. (They agree on little else.)

Health care has recently evolved from the traditional and complex, inpatient hospital setting to a point where most care is diagnosed and delivered outside the walls of hospitals. For example, consumers today are better educated and routinely use the Internet to research their malady and then explore a plethora of treatments. These can range from primary care providers who might be allopathic (MD) or osteopathic (DO) physicians to chiropractors, podiatrists, optometrists, or dentists. The consumer can choose from a variety of home test kits that may be purchased in a neighborhood pharmacy or they may again go online and order a self-test kit by next-day delivery. Consumers may query and seek services from a “virtual” primary care healthcare provider found at the end of their keyboard. They may periodically experience the convenience of a visiting home healthcare provider. Further, services sought outside the hospital might be outpatient imaging, outpatient laboratory testing, or even outpatient surgery. Other services might be to facilitate their pregnancy, to perform dialysis at home or in a center, or to simply find relief from a common allergy or their chronic pain. In any event, most care and healthcare services today are provided in non-traditional settings, *outside* of the hospital.

This text has as its central goal to familiarize all healthcare students and general readers with the numerous options and forms of non-hospital healthcare delivery. Part I of the text presents the traditional form that health care has taken and then moves to newer methods in the delivery of care. In Part II, the reader is guided through current methods of diagnosing health problems such as outpatient imaging centers, outpatient laboratories, and home diagnostic kits available from the Internet or over-the-counter in many retail pharmacies. Part III hosts a wide array of treatment options for acute care problems, ranging from hearing, speaking, seeing, and physical rehabilitation to problems of the mind, sleep-related illnesses (or rather the inability to sleep), and issues with weight loss and preventing exotic travel-related illnesses. Part IV concludes the work by illustrating the outpatient treatment of chronic illnesses, from HIV, dialysis, and oncology to long-term, palliative, and hospice care.

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