Workers' Comp

No doctor, no problem

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If you've had a medical appointment lately, it's possible you didn't see a doctor at all. For decades, the American medical system has been utilizing physician extenders including nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs) to assist with the rising demands of healthcare. In recent years, their role has expanded to be more autonomous, like having the ability to give diagnoses and write prescriptions. Pharmacists are also beginning to take on new roles. Retail stores with clinics inside and urgent care clinics are at the forefront of this new, convenient patient care.

Redefining their roles

Numerous studies have been done that concluded the primary care provided by NPs is equivalent or superior to that provided by physicians.[1] This sparked the growth of the NP field and the autonomy NPs are required to have to give treatment. Following that same trend, pharmacists are also moving towards an expanded scope or practice by promoting additional formal education, licensure standards, clinical pharmacy, and pharmaceutical care.[1] There are even highly skilled pharmacists participating in collaborative drug therapy management today. Medical journals, such as JAMA Medical Journal, have begun to document that pharmacists have the potential to show real benefits to the health industry by decreasing errors, costs, and the demand on emergency and primary care physicians. This evidence has also been cited by the Institute of Medicine.[2]

Convenient care clinics

Retail clinics are located inside of a retail store, like a supermarket or pharmacy, and are part of a broader category called convenient care clinics (CCCs).[3] Customers and patients alike can enjoy the benefits of CCCs, like extended hours of operation, convenient locations, ability to walk-in without an appointment, and shorter wait times than most clinical facilities. Customers can also do shopping while they are waiting to be seen. While not all injuries or illnesses can be treated at a CCC, it's still a great alternative to going to an emergency room when the situation isn't emergent. Plus, since the majority of CCCs are staffed with NPs, this makes these settings less expensive than seeing a physician. Pharmacists have seen their role extended to having the ability to

administer vaccines. In some states, pharmacists are able to administer most immunizations.[4] This means many people who don't have the ability to, or don't care to, pay for a doctor's visit, can still receive a vaccine through their local pharmacy. Pharmacists can even recommend vaccines, in accordance with the NVAC (National Vaccine Advisory Committee) Adult Immunization Standards.[4] Urgent care clinics allow patients to receive care outside of traditional medical offices or emergency rooms. Similarly, urgent care centers are also easy access locations. They offer extended hours and provide patients a simpler solution for receiving non-fatal, urgently necessary care. Cost effectiveness is a benefit to going to an urgent care over an emergency room as they tend to have much lower costs. A 2015 study from Merritt Hawkins showed 59% of urgent cares are staffed with NPs or physician assistants (PAs).[5]

While patients may still have a need to see a specialist or visit an emergency room, many can now find faster, more convenient care in a retail clinic or urgent care. These settings offer what is most commonly needed and provide lower cost care without an appointment. Have you seen an NP, a PA or a pharmacist in lieu of a physician for care? We'd love to hear about your experience in the comments.

[1] https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/464663_2
[2] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25077248
[3]https://www.solvhealth.com/faq/what-is-a-retail-clinic
[4]https://www.pharmacist.com/article/pharmacist-administered-immunizations-what-does-your-state-allow
[5]https://www.ihaconnect.org/About-IHA/Documents/Merritt%20Hawkins/mhawhitepaperconvenientcarePDF.pdf



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