

# The Doctor Is In

By Alison Adamo



Laura Beaty, MD, in her Sandy Springs office.

In a society where HMOs and health care plans preside over a patient-physician relationship, the concept of the family physician also being a family friend is a distant memory. While the last doctor to make a house call may very well have been on *The Brady Bunch*, it is difficult to imagine the days of old when your doctor knew your entire medical history and sent you a birthday card every year. Unfortunately, due to skyrocketing malpractice premiums, low reimbursement from insurance companies, wrestling with insurance plans to get patients the care they need and deserve, and having to see more patients to maintain income, physicians are burnt out and seeking other alternatives. These days, health care makes no house calls.

In an effort to bring back old fashioned medicine (and the passion that burns from within each physician to provide quality care for each patient), the concept of concierge medicine is gaining ground among physicians and patients alike. Fully supported by the American Medical Association, concierge care (also referred to as boutique or retainer medicine) provides patients with enhanced medical care that is hassle-free and easily accessible. By limiting the number of patients, the physician is able to build a rapport with every patient and provide service at the patient's convenience. For an annual retainer fee, patients receive premium services and personal care.

Laura Beaty, MD, knows firsthand the stress and frustration of primary care medicine. After seven years of long hours, lots of paperwork and overall unhappiness, Dr. Beaty decided to practice medicine the "old fashioned" way; she is the only female of five physicians in Atlanta currently practicing concierge care. "Patients are chronically dissatisfied with the inefficiency of

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today’s office setting,” Dr. Beaty explains. “The phone systems are a nightmare, physicians are often running late, and the check-in process can take an inordinate amount of time. At the end of the day, both the patient and the physician are unhappy — it was not the career of my dreams.”

In theory, Dr. Beaty is on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week; however, due to a smaller patient base, she has far more free time than ever before. “It is actually my preference to be available for my patients at all times,” says Dr. Beaty. “If a patient has a problem, I want to know about it. Because I develop a relationship with my patients and understand their personal health issues, I am able to give advice, offer guidance, and answer questions better than any other physician.” Dr. Beaty goes on to explain that most physicians will not treat patients over the phone, which then requires the patient to make an unnecessary trip to urgent care or wait until the next day to visit the physician. “Like any profession, I’m sure I will experience some inconvenient moments at times, but I am building a bond with my patients, and when they call at one o’clock in the morning, I know that it’s for a good reason,” Dr. Beaty comments.

The cost for concierge care could be as low as \$1,000 per year or as high as \$20,000, depending on the physician, the patient’s age and health condition, and the extent of services offered. Among services provided under concierge care are less crowded waiting rooms with rarely any wait time; flexible appointment times; house calls and out-of-office care, which could include escorting a patient to a specialist appointment; 24-hour access to the physician via cell phone, pager or email; free checkups, physicals and other services that are typically not covered; spa-like amenities and décor; and programs/advice geared towards weight loss and nutrition, preventive care and wellness. In the end, concierge medicine can save a tremendous amount of time and money. Additionally, the patient receives undivided attention not only from his or her physician, but also from someone in whom they trust.

In essence, concierge care is a re-emergence of old fashioned ideals in primary care medicine. Despite what health insurance giants want you to believe, your physician should also be your friend, and your health should be your priority. As for Dr. Beaty, she is enjoying being a physician again. “My hours are flexible, the visits are not rushed, and I am able to provide effective, personal and convenient health care for my patients,” she comments. “I am developing relationships with my patients that I hope will last my entire career. I am involved, and it’s fun again!” ❁

Laura Beaty, MD, is a spokesperson for LifeLink of Georgia, which helps to educate the public about the importance of organ and tissue donation. She maintains board certification with the American Board of Family Medicine, and she is an active member of the American Academy of Family Physicians and the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians. To learn more about Dr. Beaty, or to schedule an appointment at her Sandy Springs office, call 404.851.0029 or log onto [www.laurabeatymd.com](http://www.laurabeatymd.com).