

# The Power of Primary Care

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Instead of choosing a path of wellness centered on primary care, a growing number of insured Americans are turning to the ER, urgent care and retail clinics for non-urgent and/or routine medical needs. A recent poll conducted by NPR, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health reports that most people take this route because they believe it is more convenient and less time intensive. One in five said that at least once in the past two years, they were unable to see their primary physician because no appointments were available, the office was closed or the doctor was out of the office.

The reality is that the ER and urgent care clinic models are not constructed to emphasize ongoing primary care functions. They provide a large volume of medical services as quickly as possible to those that need immediate and/or quick attention.<sup>1</sup> Due to the intended nature of these services, there is little time allotted for the provider and patient to create a personal relationship. Therefore, patients are left to bear the burden of their own holistic care. While these environments have a place in today's health care landscape, they will not solve the problem of improving long-term health outcomes.

Research published in the American Journal of Medicine shows that people who receive care from primary care physicians are healthier, and that community and public health is better in areas with more primary care physicians. Studies have found that people in these areas live longer and have lower heart disease, cancer or stroke rates. An increase of one primary care physician per 10,000 people is associated with fewer hospital inpatient admissions (5.5 percent), outpatient visits (5 percent), emergency department visits (11 percent) and total surgeries (7 percent).

Building a relationship-based experience with patients takes primary care to the next level. A recent report on physician/patient interactions from the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf found that positive physician-patient communication increases patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment, health outcomes and well-being. It is also linked to reduced patient anxiety during clinical visits, increased patient recall and improved understanding of clinical matters discussed.

In primary care, the term “care” is not an offhand word, but rather the linchpin of a practice that focuses on building authentic, compassionate and trusting relationships with patients. A primary care provider is more than a doctor. He or she is an ally who knows and understands the whole patient—the medical history, health risks and lifestyle—and who can identify and manage changes in health.

Primary care teams are the nucleus of health care. They serve as the central point to guide care from addressing routine medical needs (annual exams and immunizations) to establishing long-term treatment plans for chronic conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

<sup>1</sup> Intent of use for urgent care based on Mt. Sinai's definition of [urgent care](#).



In order for these teams to administer the most effective and powerful primary care, they must address all the elements that encompass a patients' well-being from a financial, emotional, social, physical and intellectual perspective.

## *Elements of Primary Care<sup>2</sup>*

**Financial:** A person's financial health is based on attaining a peace of mind by managing their finances in a responsible manner. Someone who is financially healthy has developed and implemented a plan to prepare for all health care scenarios, expected and unexpected.

**Emotional:** A person's emotional health is defined by the degree to which they feel positive about themselves and their life. Someone who is emotionally healthy has the capacity to manage their feelings and related behaviors. They embrace spirituality as an inherently human characteristic.

**Social:** A person's social health is based on the contribution they make to their environment. Someone who is socially healthy makes meaningful connections within their community and willfully enhances personal relationships. They realize their importance in society and have faith that they belong to something greater than themselves.

**Physical:** A person's physical health is directly tied to a need for physical activity. A healthy individual understands the correlation between sound nutrition choices, an active lifestyle and how his body performs.

**Intellectual:** A person's intellectual health is measured by how much they expand their knowledge and skills. Intellectually healthy people value growth and stimulation and explore problem solving, creative and learning activities.

## *The Harken Health Solution: Leveraging the Power of Primary Care Both Conveniently and Compassionately*

A recent report by the CDC states that the percentage of adult ER visits remained mostly unchanged over 2013 and 2014, despite the substantial increase in Americans covered by insurance. For millions of people, the ER, urgent care and retail clinics are still a first resort because the perception is that they are more affordable and more accessible.

What this signifies is that only a monumental mindset shift will elevate the value and power of primary care. That kind of shift requires a health care offering that calls attention to and actively delivers improved access, decreased costs and all the benefits inherent to primary care, from medical expertise to nurturing doctor-patient relationships.

Harken Health is that offering.

Harken provides access to strong, authentic physician-patient relationships that serve as the foundation for primary care, which have been shown to improve patient satisfaction and reduce overall medical costs. Operationally, it empowers clinical team members to take the time necessary to address individual patient needs and goals. It eliminates or reduces historic primary care barriers to quality care, such as antiquated system designs and processes.

<sup>2</sup> The core elements of primary care are inspired by the National Wellness Institute's [Six Dimensions of Wellness](#).



## *At its powerful core, Harken Health offers access to care services and resources that directly meet the needs of today's patients*

By connecting insurance and care, Harken Health uniquely delivers a new kind of health care model. Harken Health offers access to unlimited, \$0 copay primary care visits in its Harken Health Centers, a dedicated personal Care Team, comprised of a Health Coach who is able to create attainable goals to help better the well-being for members of all ages. Given the importance of emotional health in the primary care model, Harken Health provides access to behavioral health specialists for counseling, assessments and referrals. Harken Health members also have 24/7 phone access to a Care Team member, access to trusted specialists and hospitals, in-center health and wellness classes and prescription drug coverage. The entire Harken Health relationship-based primary care model is constructed to emphasize one thing: care.

