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SUMMARY

Primary care in the United States is in crisis. Patients do not have enough time with their doctors and there is shortage of primary care physicians. But the system can be fixed, says Dr Stephen Schimpff, and he proposes how to do it.

Key Words

Primary care; patients; US health care; general practice; concierge medicine

BOOK REVIEW

Fifteen minutes—that is the average time a patient spends with a primary care physician (PCP) in the United States. Dr Stephen C Schimpff argues that a shortage of time leaves patients dissatisfied and PCPs overworked. Too many patients are sent to specialists and not enough medical students are choosing primary care as their profession.

In America today, there are 30 per cent PCPs compared to the PCP-to-specialist ratio of 70 per cent/30 per cent in most other developed countries. Furthermore, about 9 per cent of all PCP visits result in a referral to a specialist.

Dr Schimpff advocates for a return to “relationship-based medicine”. His premise is that PCPs “can handle about 90–95 percent of your healthcare and can do it effectively and cost efficiently”.

How?

He suggests the “fix” is through the use of concierge, member-based or retainer-based primary care practices.

Consumers pay a monthly fee (usually outside of their health insurance) for “exclusive” access to their doctor. In such practices, primary care providers reduce the patient load enabling them to develop a “deeper” relationship with patients and provide more comprehensive care.

Dr Schimpff offers a thought-provoking solution that could reduce the burden on US primary care providers and provide more thorough care, especially to those who are chronically ill or who have multiple health issues. In the current landscape of higher healthcare premiums and higher deductibles, the idea of spending out-of-pocket further for medical services may seem unpalatable. However, Dr Schimpff argues that it is for precisely those reasons that “direct primary care” is a feasible alternative to the status quo.

A well-researched, informative and easy-to-read book, *Fixing the Primary Care Crisis* could reinvigorate primary care and fix America’s “broken” healthcare system. This book has an American focus but would be of interest to practitioners across the US and abroad.

BOOK INFORMATION

Stephen C. Schimpff. *Fixing the Primary Care Crisis: Reclaiming the Patient-Doctor Relationship and Returning Healthcare Decisions to You and Your Doctor*. © 2015. ISBN: 9781508951728.