

High-End Healthcare

Get top-of-the-line services without the luxury budget

by [Andrea King Collier](#) - September 16, 2008

tags: [concierge medical services](#) . [healthcare](#)

Are you tired of the long wait to get in to see your doctor or the rush to get you out of the examining room once you finally get in? In a recent trend, many high-level corporate executives and successful entrepreneurs are gladly paying from \$2,000 to \$20,000 a year (not covered by insurance) to jump to the front of the healthcare line with promises of 24/7 access to their primary healthcare providers. The fee does not include any medical services.

Critics say that this kind of silver platter treatment, called concierge medical services, only goes further in widening the gap in access to quality healthcare. How do you get the best medical attention possible for yourself and your family without giving up a piece of your financial health? "You must be vigilant about managing the care you have," says **Dr. Jennifer Mieres, associate professor of medicine and director of nuclear cardiology at New York University School of Medicine**

Here are a few tips for upgrading your healthcare visits without breaking the bank:

Find that perfect fit. **"The first step in any good relationship between doctor and patient is communication and trust," says Dr. Willarda Edwards, a Baltimore internist and president of the Sickle Cell Association of America. She adds that it is important to find a doctor who is the right fit for your healthcare needs.**

Get informed. Some of the same services offered by these high-end practices, such as executive physical or preventative services including wellness and nutrition programs, may be covered under your existing plan. Ask lots of questions, and read the fine print.

Maximize your time. Concierge medical care promises shorter waits. Cut your own wait time by scheduling your visits for the first thing in the morning or when office first reopens after lunch.

Be proactive. Concierge service patients pay a premium for same day or next day appointments. Get the same consideration from your provider by being an actively enrolled patient. Many people are assigned a doctor by their healthcare plan, but don't come in until they are really ill. The first available appointment for those patients may end up being several months away.

Get acquainted. The office staff is often the gatekeeper between you and your doctor. In fact, a knowledgeable and well-trained nursing staff may be able to answer some of your routine questions without having to get to the doctor. Know the names of the people working in the office, especially the receptionist who answers the phones and books the appointments.

Gain accessibility. Telephone and e-mail response have been branded as premium services, but other doctors are willing to give you their pager number and even their e-mail address. Just ask. And remember that off-hours contact should be reserved for legitimate healthcare questions and concerns.

Gather comprehensive records. Many concierge doctors offer patients a comprehensive report on the state of their health. Get yourself a three-ring binder and a notebook. Before you go to the doctor, list your healthcare questions. Also write down the answers you get for future reference. Have a copy of any lab or diagnostic test results mailed to your house, or copied for you during the visit. Ask your doctor to go over your test results, prescriptions, and other recommendations with you at each visit.