

Group medical care taking on new meaning

By John Tozzi, Bloomberg

In a typical doctor's visit, you wait around for a while, get your vitals checked, and spend a few minutes alone in a room with a physician. It's private and short. Some doctors, frustrated by a relentless schedule of 15-minute, one-on-one visits, are experimenting with appointments that are neither.

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, around 10 percent of family doctors already offer shared medical appointments, sessions that bring together a dozen or more patients with similar medical conditions to meet with a doctor for 90 minutes. With pressure from the government and insurers to bring down the cost of care while treating the increasing number of people with health insurance, patients can expect group visits to become more common.

"It's efficient. It's economical. It's high-quality care when it's done right," says Edward Noffsinger, a California psychologist who created the model in the 1990s at Kaiser Permanente, the state's largest health maintenance organization (HMO).

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