

CLOSE & PERSONAL

BY KATIE RAPONE

How concierge medicine is changing the face of health care

PERSONALIZED HEALTH CARE

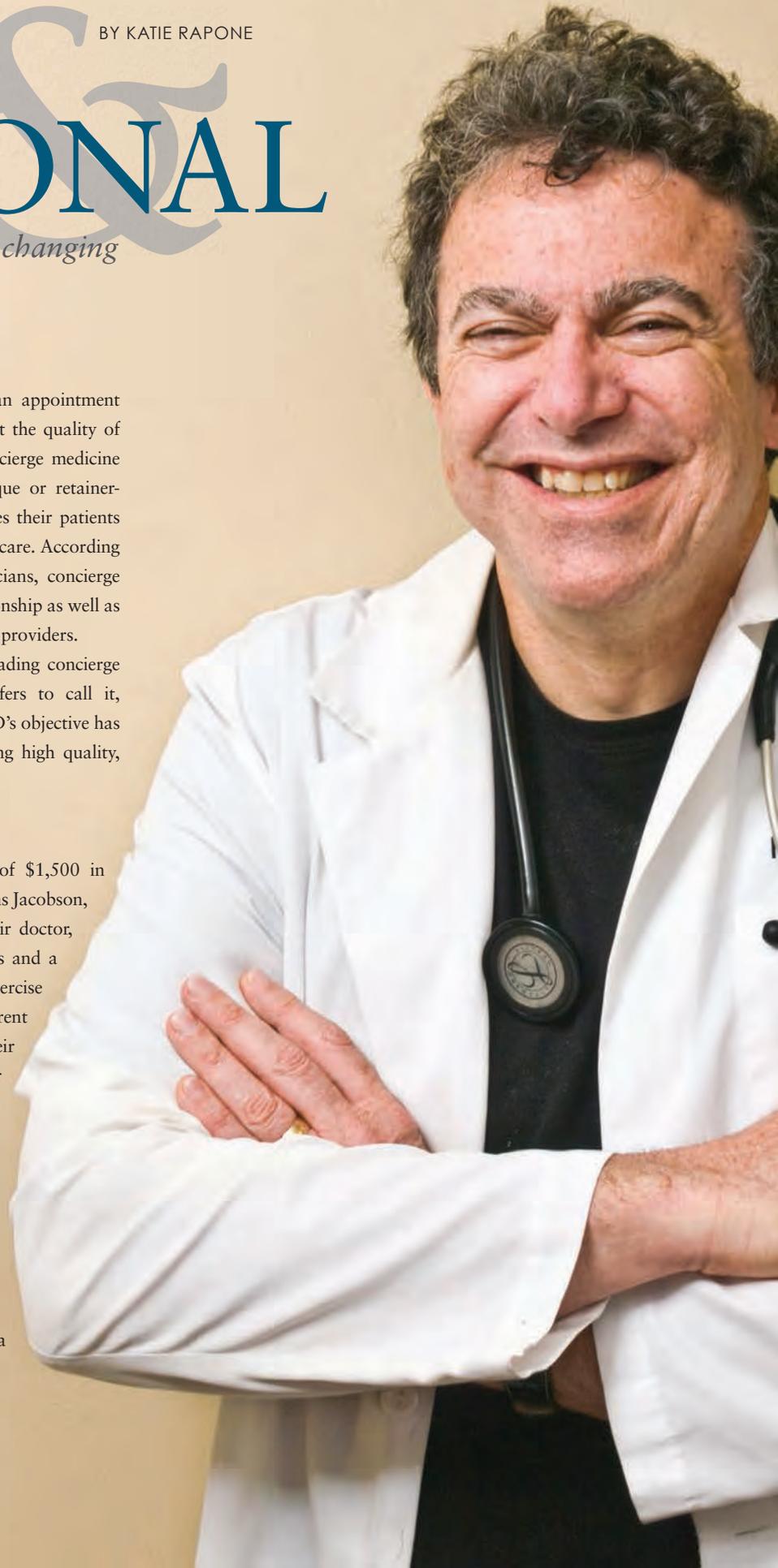
With the average primary-care physician appointment down to just 15 minutes, it's safe to say that the quality of care doctors can offer is compromised. Concierge medicine aims to change this. Also known as boutique or retainer-based medicine, a concierge physician charges their patients an annual fee, in exchange for their enhanced care. According to the American Academy of Private Physicians, concierge medicine will restore the doctor-patient relationship as well as free doctors from the constraints of insurance providers.

SignatureMD is one of the country's leading concierge providers, or as CEO Matt Jacobson prefers to call it, "personalized care." Since 2006, SignatureMD's objective has been to enhance patients' health by providing high quality, individualized care.

PATIENT BENEFITS

Members pay an annual retainer fee of \$1,500 in return for "patient-first" conveniences, explains Jacobson, including 24/7 email or phone access to their doctor, no-wait appointments, extended doctor visits and a personalized wellness plan that includes exercise and diet prescriptions. Patients keep their current health insurance, and physicians within their network continue to bill the providers for covered services, while the retainer fee covers the rest.

"Patients are given the option of joining the personalized health care program or continuing on in the existing practice under the care of an associate physician or nurse practitioner/physician assistant," says Jacobson. This is unlike other concierge programs that require all patients within a practice to join or find a new doctor.



MATTER OF FACT

A recent study has indicated that patients who are under the care of concierge physicians experience 65% fewer hospitalizations than do like-age patients in the standard health system.

INTERESTED IN A SIGNATUREMD MEMBERSHIP?

Go to signaturemd.com to find out more or check out Dr. Russak's practice at east-west-health.com

Dr. Floyd B. Russak, M.D., medical director and co-owner at East-West Health Center, in Greenwood Village, made the switch to SignatureMD. "I wanted to provide good care for people and it was getting harder to do so under the current system," says Russak. A 15-minute appointment wasn't enough time to provide the care his patients needed and deserved.

Judy Zerafa, who has been a patient of Russak's for 12 years, was delighted when she heard about SignatureMD, and was willing to pay for a membership if it meant she could have more of Russak's time. "I can reach him 24/7 personally and I can get in within a day. He has the extra time now to answer things that might be beyond the particular concern that brought me there," says Zerafa.

Under the care of a SignatureMD physician, patients receive an annual Executive Exam that, in addition to a medical history and physical exam, includes comprehensive lab testing, a skin cancer assessment, an EKG and exercise prescription. "Our physicals are an hour and a half. We have time to go over everything you should be doing: nutrition, mammograms, colonoscopies, vaccines and holistic medicine," says Russak.

While every patient is different, four to six annual visits is about average. In addition to her annual physical, Zerafa is in contact with Russak roughly every three weeks to ask a question about a vitamin or medication. "I'll email him at 9 o'clock at night and when I wake up in the morning, the answer is always there," says Zerafa.

During a time when most doctors in Denver no longer make house calls or hospital visits, SignatureMD doctors have the flexibility to do both because they have fewer patients. Russak visits patients almost every day when they are in the hospital, which he feels helps tremendously with continuity of care. From his experience and from what studies show, having a patient's own primary care doctor visit the hospital can help reduce the number of hospital errors.

PREVENTATIVE CARE

Jacobson created SignatureMD as a solution to the country's healthcare system that he feels has lost its focus on preventive medicine. "Americans are plagued by chronic diseases that are largely preventable," he says. In fact, a report from the Center for Disease Control suggests that two-thirds of all cancer cases are preventable. SignatureMD places its primary focus on preventative medicine. "Personalized care is not 'care for the sick,' but rather care for patients who want to invest in their health," says Jacobson.

Members have access to the latest in diagnostic equipment and tests, including a Panasonic CardioHealth Station and Advanced Cardio Metabolic Screening, a diagnostic test exclusive to SignatureMD that measures 15 potentially life-saving biomarkers. "There is also a test called a CIMT that can tell you with about 85 to 95 percent accuracy what your risk of a heart attack or stroke is in the next 10 or 15 years," says Russak. Without the concierge model, these tests could not be performed due to time constraints or lack of insurance provider coverage.

Once considered a service for the rich, personalized medicine is becoming more affordable and accessible for everyone. In fact, according to Jacobson, the majority of SignatureMD patients are mostly middle and upper-middle class. While he recognizes that the program is an investment, Jacobson believes investing \$1,500 per year in your health in order to avoid severe coronary disease, which has a lifetime management cost of \$1,000,000, or a stroke, which has a cost of \$140,000, just makes sense. "SignatureMD patients make a conscious decision to invest in themselves to live better, longer lives, and you cannot put a price on that." 