



### Doctors, clinics and emergencies, oh my!

Recently, our area has seen a growth in the number of urgent care clinics (or UCC). These clinics provide medical care during times when a traditional doctor's office might be closed, such as evenings, weekends, and holidays. Some patients may be uncertain how these clinics fit in to their overall medical plan or whether visiting their doctor, the local UCC, or the hospital emergency room would be the most appropriate action.

All patients should try to see their regular doctor first for their chronic and acute medical conditions, particularly those with a large number of such problems or on a large number of medications. Your regular doctor knows your complete medical history and can provide invaluable information when deciding on your treatment. Also, children, especially young infants, greatly benefit from the continuity of care that their regular doctor provides.

However, most regular doctors are not open in the evenings or weekends, but many provide an on-call number which allows you to contact them during non-office hours. I encourage all patients to try and contact their regular doctors first for any non-emergency medical conditions.

If your doctor is unavailable or you don't have a regular doctor, visiting an urgent care center may be the right choice. Most urgent care centers take patients on a first come, first serve basis, so walk-in patients are usually wel-

come. However, the wait time may be long, depending on how many patients have checked in before you and the severity of their medical conditions.

Urgent care centers can take care of most acute illnesses, such as cough, colds, sinus infection, bladder infection, sprains, etc. but do not usually treat chronic illnesses like refilling blood pressure or diabetes medications, or checking your cholesterol level. These centers are equipped to handle a wide variety of medical conditions that many regular offices do not handle, such as repairing lacerations or diagnosing and treating fractures. However, no urgent care center is equipped to handle true medical emergencies.

The cost to visit an urgent care center will usually be higher than a visit to your regular doctor because of the increased costs of operating a clinic during the evenings and on weekends and operating certain services, like an X-ray machine. Instead of the usual \$25 co-pay, the co-pay might be \$50.

The emergency room is the only place to go if you are suffering from a medical emergency. Many symptoms warrant treatment in an emergency room, such as seizure, severe chest pain, loss of consciousness, and severe shortness of breath, just to name a few. If you feel that your symptoms could represent a medical emergency, you should call 911 for immediate transport to the nearest emergency room.

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