

'Concierge' doctors on rise

Personalized care for an annual fee is mostly an option for affluent.

By Karen Knee

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Faced with rising costs and patient loads, a small but growing number of primary-care doctors are sharply reducing their practice sizes and charging each patient annual fees of about \$2,000 in exchange for personalized care.

At least 20 such "concierge" practices have sprung up in the Philadelphia area since 2002, mainly in affluent suburbs in Bucks County and the Main Line.

Nationwide, more than 800 doctors — the vast majority of them family practitioners and general internists — use some form of concierge practice, says health consultant Scott MacStravic, who has written about the topic. That number has more than doubled since 2005, he said.

A concierge doctor even stars in the television series *Royal Pains*, which ranked as the second-most-watched cable program last week.

Upper Dublin's David Badolato and Ira Gerstman offer a case study in how this



DAVID SWANSON / Staff Photographer

controversial model is evolving.

The two say they chose family practice to create a comprehensive medical home for their patients and build lifelong relationships. But by 2006, fifteen years of flat reimbursements and an

ever-increasing paperwork burden had left them working harder than ever and facing a fiscal meltdown.

Badolato and Gerstman then switched to concierge, while the other eight physicians in their practice con-
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Physician Jon Yardney examines Ann Lolli, 85, of Wayne. Fed up with patient loads and costs, some doctors offer personalized care to fewer patients for an annual fee.

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