

CHECKUPS

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For decades, there has been a tradition where patients will go and see their doctors semi-annually or annually for checkups. In the last few years, there has been some debate as to whether a checkup examination is really a worthwhile expenditure of time and money. Governmental groups and insurance companies have looked at this traditional visit and have suggested they might replace the old standard checkup of the past with a “targeted screening”.

There is a move in managed care to move away from the semi-annual or annual checkup because they do not feel that the cost of performing a general evaluation is justified. I believe some quality time with your doctor can be very beneficial. The many proponents in the government and the private insurance sectors trying to control costs feel that annual visits don't necessarily mean that patients will undergo any preventative screening. They also feel that annual checkups and broad screening studies such as random blood tests and x-rays could be too costly and not justifiable.

On the other side of the argument, doctors and patients generally look at checkups as necessary and helpful. Many of the benefits received in a checkup cannot be measured by statistics and analysis, as government and insurance agencies tend to do. The way our system is set up currently, insurance companies only want to pay if the diagnosis is positive. For example, a patient who smokes against medical advice might be savvy enough to go to see his doctor once or twice a year to have a chest x-ray to screen for lung cancer. If the patient is lucky enough to have a negative chest x-ray, the insurance company might balk at paying for that x-ray since it was normal. Quality time with one's doctor may coax the patient to go forward with a chest x-ray, whereas if he were in a non-doctor directed screening system provided by an insurance company he may not be motivated to go through with the chest x-ray.

We live in a world where all efforts are made to speed up, streamline, and decrease the cost of things and arguably medicine is no different and included in this effort. Yes, I understand the health dollar is getting stretched, but we must be careful to walk a fine line. We don't want to do away with the time-honored physician and patient relationship and personal things such as human touch and reassurance that things are okay.

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