

McLean doctor gets personal

McLean - Great Falls

By Monty Tayloe

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When Dr. Mark Paster got out of school and started actually practicing as a family doctor, he found the work wasn't quite what he expected. Paster saw his patients for increments of 10 minutes and had literally thousands of active patients. Practicing medicine that way, the way it is commonly practiced in the United States, is difficult.

"You don't have time to adequately talk to a patient – the relationship is not strong," Paster said.

Now, at the new McLean offices of PartnerMD, Paster is finally getting the chance to practice medicine at a more personal level. Paster and his fellow PartnerMD physician Sandy Ibrahim now spend at least half an hour and often longer with their patients and they have a lot fewer of them. Patients have the cell phone numbers of their doctors, and if a patient needs it, Ibrahim and Paster will make house calls.

For PartnerMD patient Pamela Minetta, that attention makes all the difference.

"I am terrible about going to the doctor, but they take real good care of me," Minetta said. When Paster thinks Minetta should see a specialist, PartnerMD makes the appointment for her. After a visit to her new doctors, Minetta receives a binder with detailed explanations of her doctors' recommendations and her medical records.

"We have the time to take a closer interest in our patients," Ibrahim said.

PartnerMD offers "concierge medicine," a new style of medical practice that emphasizes a personalized, in-depth relationship with a physician in exchange for a yearly membership fee on top of the usual medical fees. According to PartnerMD spokesman Neil Hoyt, that fee is about \$1,900 a year.

"We're seeing fewer patients and spending more time with them, so we have to charge the membership fee to keep the lights on," Ibrahim said.

The fee is worth it "since I get to talk to my patients, I can catch things earlier, I can ask more questions," said Paster, who described discovering an unsuspected life-threatening heart condition in one patient. PartnerMD started in Richmond, after founder Linda Nash had to wait four hours in a hospital hallway while administrators struggled to contact her physician.

"You can get that kind of personalized service from your lawyer or your financial planner. You should be able to get it from your doctor," Nash said.

For more information about PartnerMD, call 703-288-3750 or visit its offices at 6862 Elm St., Suite 700, in McLean.