

Family Physicians of Old Town Fairfax

David D.

Leonard MD, Eric S. Vallone MD Kathleen Crane-Lee MD

3911 Old Lee Highway #41C Fairfax VA 22030 ☎ 703-352-7100

FPFairfax.com

FPFairfax@aol.com Fax 703-591-7106

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Dear Patients,

The purpose of this letter is to point out that although your medical costs are going up; but it is not going to the physicians who are responsible for your care. This office provides many services that most primary care and specialty medical offices do not. We are not compensated financially for these services but will continue to provide them as long as we are able. We went into medicine for the right reasons and our primary focus is your good health.

Blood draws/ Laboratory work

We are fortunate to have a skilled phlebotomist from Quest Diagnostic Labs. The phlebotomists are employed by Quest and her services are offered to our patients as a convenience. We are one of the few select primary care physicians who have been designated as a Quest drawing station for our patients exclusively. Our patients have the luxury of having their blood drawn here saving them much time. They avoid the aggravation of fighting traffic and having to wait waiting two to three hours at a lab drawing station.

Our office does not receive any financial incentive or payment for this service. The cost of the lab work itself is between Quest and your insurance company. Again our practice does not receive any financial compensation for providing this service to you. In fact our practice may lose money drawing blood because we are one of the only very few practices who take the time to call you with your lab results even when they are normal. We hired registered nurses to do this because it helps us provide you the highest quality of medical care possible. If you do not hear from us within four business days about your lab work, please call us. It is important that we have an up to date telephone number.

You have probably read that our practice is not able to draw blood on United Healthcare patients or their subsidiaries. Apparently, United Healthcare signed an exclusive contract with Lab Corp requiring all of their patients to go to a Lab Corp drawing stations. **If patients insured by United Healthcare have their lab drawn at Quest, the lab bill will be the patient's responsibility. United has also stated they will fine the physician \$50 per incident.** Many of our United Healthcare patients are upset with this new policy. I had one patient tell me that it took her almost four hours to blood drawn at Lab Corp when it could have been done here in five

minutes during her office visit.

We are hopeful that other insurance companies allow us to continue having the patients' blood drawn here. It increases patient compliance and reduces the possibility of medical errors.

Vaccination costs

Many patients have complained about the high cost of vaccinations. They have expressed surprise that our office charges Medicare \$158 for the shingles vaccine. Basically Medicare reimburses us our cost for the vaccination (\$158) plus a seven dollar administration fee. Our costs for acquiring, storing, administering, and record keeping far exceed the seven dollar reimbursement. In fact many primary care offices no longer offer vaccinations to their patients and require them to go to the health department to get their immunizations. Pediatric vaccinations are paid even less. The costs to many primary care practices to purchase the vaccines are greater than the amount the insurance companies reimburse. In the March 24, 2007 New York Times there was a front page article about this very issue.

Prescription refills

Prescription refills is another issue that some patients have commented on. We literally get hundreds of prescription refill requests per day and we have a hoard of employees to get these requests filled in a safe and timely manner. There are multiple steps our office must take for you to get a refill. After the request comes in, your chart is pulled for a physician review. This review is usually done at the end of the day. If the prescription is approved, the information is recorded in the chart and the script is faxed into the pharmacy. Because of the time involved, many medical offices are charging a fee for this service (\$25 per script) to help cover their overhead. We do not currently charge for this service but we prefer that patients get their prescriptions written during their office visit. This reduces the risk of a medication error.

Quality care

There is a looming crisis in medicine today. There are not enough quality primary care physicians (family physicians, internists, geriatricians, pediatricians) in practice. Practice overhead continues to rise while the reimbursement continues to decline. Recent medical graduates from the United States medical schools are shunning the primary care residencies to go into more lucrative fields such as dermatology or anesthesiology. In fact last year less than 50 percent of the family practice residency spots were filled by physicians who graduated from accredited United States medical schools. Many of these spots are filled by graduates of Mexican and Caribbean medical schools.

It is increasing difficult to find quality family practice residency graduates who are willing to dedicate their lives to the practice of medicine. As insurance companies continue to cut their reimbursement rates to primary care doctors, patients will not be able to find high quality family physicians.

When people enjoy good health, they tend not to focus on the quality of their health care. The

time they do focus on this issue is during a time of personal health crisis or when a loved one is seriously ill. That is when they hope they have a qualified, dedicated well trained physician in their corner who know the most skilled specialists and can gain access to the best medical centers in the world. This practice strongly advocates on your behalf and will help ensure you have access to the finest health care possible.

Sincerely,

David D. Leonard, MD