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EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON HEALTH CARE CONSUMPTION

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Now that shelter-in-place orders are beginning to ease a bit, we can reflect on what happened when we were constantly at home. Was that life? Definitely, but it was very different from our usual fast pace of work, school, activities, commuting, take out, etc. Are there aspects of our time at home that we would like to keep? Are there things that we would like to let go?

I think the answer may differ for each of us, but we do share some commonalities when it comes to having more time on our hands.

I know I would like to keep my family time and my awareness and appreciation for our essential workers like those in grocery, delivery, and health care. I miss hanging out with my friends, singing in a choir, getting a haircut, and chatting with strangers in the grocery line.

In my professional life, I work with companies to help them provide quality and effective health care to their employees. The Covid-19 crisis has changed some aspects of how we use the health care system, where there will most certainly also be some things we will keep and let go.

One big keep is where or how care is delivered for non-emergencies. Most health insurance plans have offered a telehealth component for a few years, with minimal usage. It is a convenient way to have a doctor visit any time of the day or night, and obtain a prescription if needed.

VIRTUAL CARE

When we were first ordered to shelter in place, our local providers quickly figured out how to provide this same type of care, but from your usual primary care physician groups. This has allowed patients to continue receiving care for chronic or ongoing health conditions and provided a venue for diagnosis and treatment of new issues, all from our own doctor group. Seeking care virtually is a win-win. We can choose to see our own provider or find care from one sponsored by our health plan.

What's the future of virtual care? Now that our local providers have figured out how to offer this, I think they will adopt a triage-style system, so when you call for an appointment, they will only ask you to come in person if necessary. This saves everyone time without sacrificing needed care.

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COMMERCIAL INSURANCE

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

PERSONAL INSURANCE

RISK MANAGEMENT

SURETY



Additionally, while we wait for a vaccine for the coronavirus, it only brings those into clinics who absolutely need in-person care, thereby reducing contact between patients. You can get the care you need, avoid waiting rooms and commute time, and the cost is generally less than an in-person visit.

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Our hospitals' emergency departments have experienced a dramatic reduction in cases during the past couple of months. Yes, many of the Covid-19 patients have come through the emergency room, but most other emergency care has stopped. Nationally, [different studies](#) have shown that an estimated 25 to 55% of emergency department visits are potentially avoidable. This translated into the "[worried well](#)" avoiding the emergency department and seeking lower cost care elsewhere during the pandemic. We may also see those with more serious issues who were too scared to go to the emergency room for needed treatment have difficult and costly recoveries from things like heart attacks, strokes, and appendicitis.

If there is something to let go, it is the fear of using the emergency room when we really need it, and what we keep is not using the emergency room for conditions that can better be managed by your primary care physician or through virtual care. We are also bringing back the old-fashioned self-care models, where you used some tried-and-true home remedies for (non-Covid-19 related) sore throats, coughs, headaches, backaches, etc. before seeking treatment from a physician. Time can be an excellent healer if we can just slow down long enough to let our bodies get better on their own.

I think the challenge as our lives start moving towards the new normal will be to make our own lists of what to keep and what to let go of from our time sheltering in place. One thing I know for sure is that how we seek health care in the future will be different. Count on virtual visits becoming the norm and the use of the emergency room being reserved for what it was designed for – life-threatening emergencies.