



Fewer Doctors Could Put Strain On Your Body And Wallet

by Peter Bukowski

Making a visit to see your family doctor can save you a trip to the ER.

"A competently trained primary care physician should be able to manage roughly 80 to 85% of a person's medical problems before they need to refer out to specialty areas," says Dr. Stan Flemming President of Pacific Northwest University.

And you're not just saving your body by getting a check up.

"The cost savings is huge. When you look at the average cost of an office visit as compared to the average cost of an ER visit, there's just absolutely no comparison. It will cost a patient an average of 4-5 times the amount it would to see a primary care physician," explains Flemming. But family docs are disappearing, making it harder and harder to be seen.

"We do not have enough primary caregivers in the pipeline to backfill what we're losing."

And they're losing a lot. Out of 800,000 doctors in the US, more than 350 thousand will retire in the next decade. With less than 20,000 medical students graduating each year, supply just can't keep up with demand. And the patients are suffering.

"We pay physicians for the number of procedures they do, not the quality of time they spend with the patients," Flemming says.

Yakima Family Doc Carl Olden isn't sure of a solution

"These are all very complex questions and not a whole lot of good answers I don't think at this point...You're not gonna suddenly grow physicians overnight. So you have to make better of us those of us who are here"

At the very least Olden says, a little time with your doctor for cheap, is better than an extended stay in the ER both for your body and your wallet.