

Study Snapshot:

The Rise of Retail Clinics and Their Influence on Primary Care Relationships

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key findings

- Patients who visit a retail clinic are subsequently less likely to seek care from a primary care physician.
- There was no change in utilization of preventative care or diabetes management among patients who elected to visit a retail clinic.

The Question:

Does visiting a retail clinic impact primary care relationships?

There is a growing demand for primary care as provisions of the Affordable Care Act seek to expand accessibility of health services. Retail clinics, which are located within retail establishments and provide walk-in care for simple conditions such as the flu, the common cold, or an ear infection, may help to address that demand. In a HCFO-funded study, Ateev Mehrotra, M.D., M.P.H., policy analyst at the RAND Corporation and associate professor at Harvard Medical School, and colleagues examined the relationship between utilization of a retail clinic and primary care functions. As the numbers of retail clinics continue to increase in the wake of emerging partnerships between major retail establishments and regional health service providers, they may be a key force in determining where individuals decide to turn for preventative care. The full results of the study are available in the *Journal of Internal General Medicine*. Related findings appear in the *American Journal of Managed Care*.

The Implications:

As retail clinics expand their presence, there is concern among primary care physicians that this model of care delivery may decrease quality and continuity of care. Mehrotra and colleagues found a notable decrease in visits to a primary care physician among the group of patients who elected to seek care at a retail clinic. Moreover, an initial retail clinic visit was associated with an increase in subsequent visits to a retail clinic, as well as a decrease in continuity of care compared to those who did not visit a retail clinic. However, the study documented other possible reasons for decreased continuity and found no change in utilization of preventative care or diabetes management. Thus, in some aspects, retail clinics may or may not have a negative impact. The researchers point out that since a first visit to a retail clinic was associated with a decrease in continuous visits with a primary care provider, it is important that retail clinic visit notes are incorporated into a patient's overall medical records if there is an established primary care relationship. As the numbers of retail clinics in the United States continue to grow, continued focus on their impact on primary care is needed.

Contact Us

For more information on the results from this grant, please contact the principal investigator, Ateev Mehrotra, M.D., at mehrotra@rand.org.

¹ The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Changes in Health Care Financing and Organization (HCFO) Initiative supports timely and policy relevant health services research on health care policy, financing, and organizational issues.



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If you would like to learn more about other HCFO-funded work, please contact: Bonnie J. Austin, HCFO Deputy Director | bonnie.austin@academyhealth.org