

To: Whom It May Concern  
From:  
Date: January 9, 2019  
Re: Patient Relations

To Whom It May Concern,

Let me begin by saying I believe most of the caregivers at Spectrum Health are there to help patients live healthier lives. That belief came into sharp contrast with an experience I recently had, the result of which left me reticent to share information about my health with my doctor. To me, that result seems at great odds with an organization created to advance health. I hope you feel the same. I also sincerely hope someone with influence is able to read this letter and effect change. I believe the visit that left me with this feeling was not the result of an uncaring physician or nurse, but a systemic issue that should, and can, be fixed.

During a recent wellness visit to my new primary care physician (my first in many years, since up until now I had relied on my OBGYN), I experienced what felt like a very routine appointment. I saw the doctor for about 15 minutes. She asked me all the regular questions including: "Are you experiencing any health issues?" I responded by saying my knee sometimes got stiff at the end of the day. She suggested continuing to exercise and perhaps taking a vitamin. This conversation lasted perhaps two minutes. She didn't do any additional treatment, testing or prescribe me anything. There was no follow up scheduled. There was no indication that this was anything other than a typical conversation one might have with their new doctor.

A month later, I received my bill. It included a charge for my wellness visit, covered by insurance, and a second charge of \$142 that was not covered for something that occurred on the very same day. When I called billing, I was informed that once you have a conversation about something that's not considered preventative, you are billed for an additional consultation. I called someone at the office of Dr.XXXX who told me the same thing, albeit with more empathy. I was told an office manager would call me back. As of a week later, that has not happened. I then called patient relations and spoke with XXXXXX and I told her how this made me feel.

This experience made me feel deceived. It made me feel like I need to be skeptical of my doctor. I can't answer questions she asks me without first inquiring how much this will cost. I can't tell her about my health issues because I'll be penalized for it. I was told I was given a pamphlet explaining what was covered during a wellness visit. That may be true. However, if a doctor asks me a simple question, it is not intuitive to decline to answer or to question her motives. It felt a little like entrapment.

I thought the purpose of a primary care doctor was to have a partner in my journey to live a healthy life - someone who will get to know me over time. It seems I was wrong.

I realize this is a Spectrum Health policy. This doctor clearly follows it to the letter. I've been told the healthcare experience is essentially about honest communication between a patient and a caregiver. This policy completely undermines that goal.

Most alarming to me is the lack of transparency during this visit. At any time, the doctor could have said, "We can address this issue in another visit." Or, "If this is an issue you'd like to discuss, I'll need to log it as an additional consultation." I can tell you - my knee didn't hurt that much. I wouldn't have mentioned it. A simple, transparent conversation like this one is what the lady I talked to in Dr. XXXX office suggested. She agreed with my concern and felt an easy fix is transparency. But, there was nothing she could do. Perhaps, listening to people on the front lines would help inform a better Spectrum policy.

I'm told physicians aren't comfortable having a transparent conversation like the one suggested above. But, they are comfortable silently writing it down. And, guess what? Now, I'm uncomfortable. I feel like my doctor made a quiet note in her chart, and then sent me off knowing I'd receive an unexpected bill right after the holidays. Isn't her primary goal to make me comfortable so that I share honest information about my health? If not, something is wrong, in my opinion, and I suggest Spectrum reassess its priorities.

I will not be going back to this doctor. How can I? I no longer feel like I can have the most basic of conversations with her. Since this appears to be a Spectrum policy, I will find a new primary care physician with another health group.

If someone does read this letter, I'd very much appreciate a response. I'd like to know if you really do value patient relations and input. I'd like to know if anything happens in regards to this issue.

I realize your mission is a massive one. This letter is meant to be constructive and helpful. I do believe you intend to provide the best care possible for patients. I do not believe it happened in this case and I think you can fix it.

Sincerely,  
XXXXX