



Insight

Retail Clinics: Friend or Foe of the Healthcare System?

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Retail clinics located in drugstore chains such as Walgreens, CVS and Walmart provide convenient and inexpensive medical care alongside a healthcare system that has become increasingly difficult to access and expensive. Longer hours, walk-in appointments, accessible locations and the ability to immediately fill prescriptions attract patients away from physician offices or urgent care centers. While most can agree that retail clinics are appropriate for certain services, vaccinations for example, their role in tomorrow's healthcare system is uncertain.

The Washington Post's Sarah Kliff recently [wrote about](#) CVS's [presentation](#) to investors, in which they pitch their clinics' ability to provide high quality care at a lower cost amid a primary care physician shortage. However, critics argue that without access to a patient's medical record, clinics cannot have all of the information necessary to provide good medical care. Kliff mentions the clinics' isolation and notes that some are working to integrate themselves with nearby health systems and retail clinics may try to be part of Accountable Care Organizations.

While convincing physicians, patients and insurers of retail clinics' value will take more evidence, it is clear that traditional healthcare settings can learn from the success of this business model. Longer hours, shorter wait times, transparent pricing and the use of [allied health professionals](#) to provide less expensive care clearly appeal to people and should therefore be available. Millions of Americans seek care at retail clinics, and regardless of whether this is good or bad for patients, it clearly indicates there is a market for quick and inexpensive services. Ideally, convenience and cost-savings would be combined with coordinated care, access to electronic health records and the use of allied health professionals where appropriate. I predict that the ability of traditional healthcare providers to adjust to consumer needs and provide such care will play a large role in determining the

future popularity and profitability of retail clinics.