Building Better Systems Around Patient-Centered Care: A New Communications Model for Direct Primary Care Providers

How enhanced communication technologies support the resurgence of Direct Primary Care (DPC) by strengthening patient-provider relationships.

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Introduction

While the term Direct Primary Care (DPC) has only been in widespread use and application since the late 1990s, the approach is anything but – in fact, it's a return to the original roots of U.S. medical care. DDPC is a patient-centered care model where either a single doctor or a small group of medical professionals provide routine and preventative care to a consistent group of regular patients. This approach contrasts with the larger corporate systems, which often feature constantly changing staff, offices, and practitioners. This approach allows patients to develop long-term collaborative relationships with their providers over time and better plan their care. A lot like the neighborhood family doctors of old.

Amidst today's backdrop of ever-increasing insurance premiums, confusing plans that can change annually, shifting governmental policies and less consistent employment affecting people's healthcare options, DPC is growing rapidly in America. Estimates show the number of people choosing DPC as their primary healthcare option rose 241% overall from 2017–2021 and has continued to increase at an annual rate of 36% per year.

So, what's fueling this rise in popularity? One key factor is cost. With all-inclusive premiums at around $80-100 per month per person, DPC often outperforms "traditional" healthcare plans regarding value, especially on a family basis. Removing per-visit fees and transitioning away from the fee-for-service model allows patients greater access to medical services and consultations without worrying about fluctuating costs, ensuring care expenses remain stable and predictable. This also encourages them to take a more long-term wellness approach to their health, which leads to better health outcomes in the long run.

> Direct Primary Care (DPC) is a return to the original roots of U.S. medical care, focused on **patient-centered care** and **long-term collaborative relationships** between patients and providers.

The other major factor, and perhaps the most decisive one, is the ability of patients to build long-term personal relationships with medical providers who are actively involved in their care.

Primary care physicians (PCPs) working within insurance constraints have for years had to keep stretching themselves thinner and thinner to balance their own economics and to support insurance provider staffing and profit structures. This often results in PCPs having panels of 2,500 patients or more, with individual care predictably suffering. In contrast, direct primary care physicians typically have fewer than 800 patients, which in part leads to their consultations averaging around 40 minutes per patient, compared to just under 16 minutes for PCPs in traditional healthcare systems.

The DPC model's "always-on" approach encourages frequent interaction between doctors and patients, with offices often providing 24/7 access and quick responses for anything from general advice to those middle-of-the-night calls to reassure sick children's parents.

In short, the DPC model is more personal, more involved and, in many cases, more cost-effective than traditional systems. So, it's little wonder that it's quickly becoming more widespread.

However, because of these differences from typical medical providers, running a direct primary care practice requires a different approach and setup than that of traditional medical offices. It's important, therefore, for DPCs to be aware of their communications options in particular.

Direct Primary Care: A Modern Approach to Health

While it's easy to see the benefits of DPC from the patient side – better access and, in many cases, lower costs – there are also a number of advantages for providers and even employers to adopt the model.

For providers, it can mean avoiding the headache of today's insurance billing system, which frees staff time and greatly reduces overhead costs, sometimes by as much as 40%. Many providers also report more job satisfaction and feeling more effective from regularly seeing a smaller group of patients and focusing more on long-term outcomes.

Further, the DPC approach has clear cost benefits for employers and even policymakers. For example, a recent actuarial report found that DPC patients had 40% fewer emergency room visits than traditional patients and that their overall healthcare costs were also lower.

DPC offices' most common characteristics include:

• **Membership-based:** Most DPCs work off of a subscription-based model, where patients pay a recurring fee for service access. All fees are clarified up front, including what services are and aren't provided.

• **Comprehensive services:** DPCs try to address as wide a range of patient health needs as possible, which includes primary care, preventative care, acute care, routine check-ups, diagnostic tests and even ongoing chronic care.

• **Longer and more frequent appointments:** Typically, a DPC appointment will be much longer than a traditional primary care consultation, allowing for more discussion, evaluation and personalized care. There's also no limit to the number of office appointments, so patients can come more often if needed.

• **Simplified billing:** There's usually no insurance billing for routine care services in a DPC model, so administration for practices is simpler.

• **Focus on wellness and provider-patient relationship:** Priority is given to actions like preventive screening and lifestyle counseling, as well as strengthening the relationship between patients and providers to focus on long-term health and wellness.

• **Flexibility and communication:** DPC practices pride themselves on close and frequent contact with patients through various channels - phone, telemedicine, video or whatever is most convenient. DPCs are generally available well after traditional office hours and, in many cases, 24/7. Practices are also flexible in how they work with other specialists, labs, pharmacies and other elements of the medical ecosystem.

DPC offices and practices tend to be smaller than their traditional counterparts, so they often need partners to ensure they can manage operations and provide the services their patients demand. These solutions can be either highly technical or more straightforward, but wherever your DPC office is, it's important to consider options that streamline operations, provide value for money and let you keep your focus on what's most important to your practice and differentiated approach – your patients.

> DPC often outperforms 'traditional' healthcare plans regarding value...**removing per-visit fees** and **transitioning away from the fee-for-service model** allows patients greater access to medical services.

Communication Challenges in DPC

One of the main precepts of Direct Primary Care is availability – in fact, 24/7 access is often a core aspect of the DPC proposition. Therefore, providers take on a very serious responsibility, where reliable and secure after-hours call management is crucial to their practice's daily operations, patient care and trust.

Whatever the time of day, all providers often need a main line answering solution, switching and routing and ways to track and transfer calls. This is particularly important for smaller offices where staff will likely be covering more tasks and potentially away from their desks or stations for more than a few minutes.

For many providers, a reliable VoIP solution can solve the challenges of call routing during the day and forwarding to answering service after the office is closed. For example, RingRx's virtual receptionist feature helps patients connect with your team easily. It can also reduce wait times through personalized greetings, on-demand messages and information, and customized call routing. The system can also work with after-hours live and virtual answering services such as RingRx's free OnCall service to ensure that all patients can reach your practice at any time, helping you provide the kind of constant access that DPC patients require. Finally, the mobile app and online capabilities mean you can manage your office's phone system from anywhere, so you'll always be on top of whatever's happening.

Optimizing Operations with RingRx

Operating a direct primary care practice often means significantly reducing the time and resources spent on administrative overhead that comes with insurance billing and integration. Many offices would also want to avoid adding too much burden on the technology side.

Fortunately, RingRx gives you options to streamline how your office operates and communicates. Fax services can be fully integrated, reducing paperwork and manual tracking while providing better access and accountability – no more searching for paper faxes or wondering if transmissions really went through.

You can also use RingRx for managing patient messaging, ensuring compliance and security while providing more convenience for patients. Messaging can also be used for wellness programs, including appointment and medication reminders and wellness tips and ideas. Moreover, RingRx's on-call and video conferencing features ensure that providers can offer continuous, comprehensive care. The on-call service optimizes after-hours communication, directing urgent calls to the appropriate provider, while our video solution supports telemedicine by facilitating secure, hassle-free video consultations.

Messaging can also make it easier for patients to provide information to your practice and also increase the number of touchpoints and frequency of interaction. Integrating SMS functions into your practice's main phone and fax system and leveraging on-call scheduling and seamless video calls allows your practice to save time and be more efficient in patient communications while better centralizing and tracking your outreach.

> RingRx's integrated fax and messaging services **simplify practice administration,** allowing DPC providers to focus on delivering **personalized care** without the hassle of managing complex technology systems.

Cost Control through Technology

DPCs, by nature, tend to be smaller operations, which can mean they aren't always able to make large technology investments.

One of RingRx's key advantages is our cost-efficient software-based approach to centralizing and managing all medical office communications. This efficiency extends to our on-call and video services, designed to streamline patient-provider interactions without incurring high costs. This is made possible because we own our platform, so there are no additional software, licenses, or third-party costs to account for and no monthly equipment maintenance costs.

With RingRx, you can expect to save 50 percent or more than a traditional landline and 30 percent or more than competing services from cable and other VoIP providers. The inclusion of comprehensive on-call management and video conferencing further enhances the value of our service, providing DPC practices with the tools they need to deliver exceptional care.

Seamless Integration & Scalability

RingRx was built on an open standards base for ease of integration and extensibility, with a robust API at the forefront. All our components were designed to be interoperable and able to integrate EMRs, revenue cycle management applications, reputation management solutions, and more. That means we can implement our solution for you with as little disruption as possible to your existing technological ecosystem.

Because RingRx is cloud-based and optimized for mobility, it allows for easy cross-site integration and collaboration, whether you and your staff are on-site or working from multiple locations. We also have built the platform to ensure there are always opportunities for integration with other software applications that may be part of your office's operations, now or in the future.

Security, Privacy, & Compliance

When running a small business, the last thing your office needs or wants to deal with is compliance issues – they can grind your operations to a halt and quickly erode patient trust. That's why it's important to choose partners who understand the demands of HIPAA and data security regulations but have built it into every part of their systems.

RingRx's secure cloud-based platform was created from the start with HIPAA, healthcare security, and privacy in mind. All our staff are HIPAA certified, and we maintain our commitment to security through ongoing education and training. Further, all data is securely encrypted to ensure privacy and regulatory compliance.

RingRx's **HIPAA-certified platform** guarantees the security and privacy of patient information, making it an ideal choice for DPC practices that **prioritize patient confidentiality and regulatory compliance.**

Further, RingRx can manage network and data custody audits for compliance needs and system access audit logs, ensuring you have the full audit trail of everyone who listened to or contacted a voicemail. Messaging is also secure, sent through encrypted channels that comply with current regulations.

However, none of this matters if employees can't access the features. This is why we've built our platform to work for employees at all levels – so even your least technical staff will find it easy to use and easy to be sure that your practice remains HIPAA compliant.

Customization for the Unique DPC Environment

Each direct primary care office differs. RingRx's solutions can be custom-tailored to each practice's needs, whether they are integrating with an existing system, transitioning to a new one or building their communications solution from scratch. To accommodate DPC's focus on patients and patient communication, RingRx can structure our user-friendly platform to ensure your practice can continue to deliver care at the highest levels without adding complexity or other challenges.

Whether it's patient messaging features, call forwarding or ensuring all patient interactions get automatically integrated into patient records, RingRx can design a structure that complements and supports your primary needs, all in an easy-to-use package.
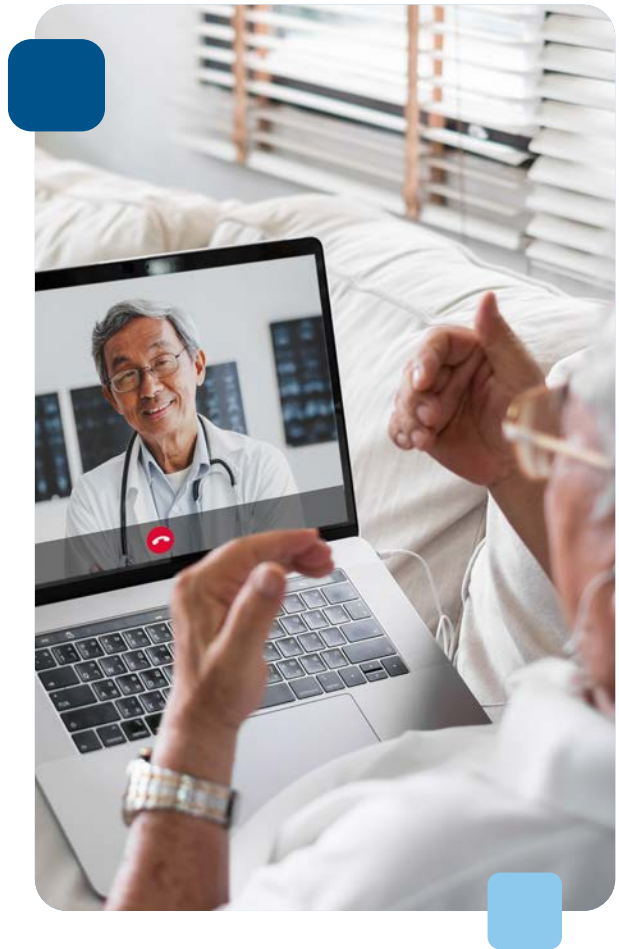
Conclusion

Many DPCs came about because physicians believed they could provide better care by simplifying their operations and focusing more on their patients. They wanted to strip away what was unnecessary and restructure how they worked to achieve better outcomes.

At RingRx, we see our mission along similar lines. We want to provide intuitive and useful technology that works behind the scenes, allowing our customers to focus on what matters most.

For DPCs, we aim to provide a more efficient, patient-centered experience that everyone in their organization can easily use and work with, ultimately allowing them not to think about the technology. That way, they can fulfill the promise of direct primary care and continue building and growing long-term relationships with their patients.

Let us help bring your DPC office's operations to the next level so you and your team can spend less time and money on running the office and more time on what matters most. With RingRx, you can quickly streamline and improve efficiency, ensuring that primary care remains your primary focus.

Book a Demo today!

To learn more about RingRx and if it fits your organization, book a demo or contact us at (888) 980-6860 and request a free trial.

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