

## News Story

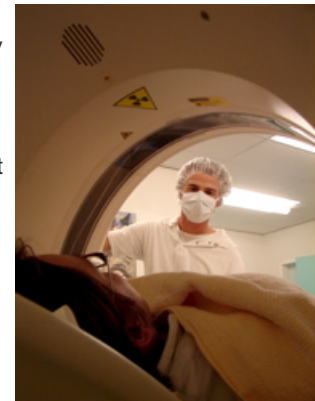
Exec Lifestyles: Private clinics join battle against doctor shortages  
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With private health-care clinics cropping up across the country offering preventative health care not offered by the public system, many wonder if the assessments are really worth their annual fees.

Greg Nyman, 41, general manager of an Ottawa-based medical diagnostics company, doesn't need any convincing. He had heartburn-like symptoms for a couple of years, but like so many people, thought he was suffering from a minor ailment.

During his four-hour health assessment at ExecHealth, an Ottawa-based private preventive care clinic offered as part of his corporate health care package, a physician suspected something more serious and arranged additional testing.

Mr. Nyman's exam revealed he had gallbladder disease.



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"I was probably close to (hospitalization). I got in with a surgeon and because it was caught in time, they were able to do it laparoscopically, with a so-called 'key-hole incision,' rather than opening me up. If it gets too inflamed, they have to open you up and that's when you're in the hospital for weeks," Mr. Nyman said. After weekend surgery, "I was on a plane the next Monday."

Assessments at ExecHealth, which generally run just over \$1,200, involve a team of medical doctors, nutritionists, nurses, physiotherapists and fitness experts. Clients are provided with a written health report that includes meal planning and personal training sessions, according to Sanjay Shah, the company's president.

"In the public system, first you get sick, then you go to the doctor's, then you get treated. Our intention is to keep people healthy, prevention is our goal," said Mr. Shah.

Business is booming for Mr. Shah; he plans to move to a larger facility to accommodate his growing list of clients, he added.

But it's not just Mr. Shah's company reaping the rewards of a growing market for executive health – other clinics are popping up in the area, as well. La Vie Executive Health Centre was opened last May in the Brookstreet Hotel by Dr. Hassan Sannoufi. La Vie offers a four-and-a-half-hour annual exam with a full report, plus a USB drive for portable medical information.

"We look at medical, nutritional, fitness and lifestyle issues. With those four elements we can provide a thorough assessment for the clients and uncover any risk factors that they are facing," said Leo Maiorino, VP of sales and operations at La Vie.

But some say these facilities are opening the door to a two-tier health-care system in Canada, where the rich get to jump ahead of the poor.

Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition, is a vocal opponent of clinics like ExecHealth and La Vie. She says private clinics are taking desperately needed doctors from the publicly funded system.

"We find these clinics very damaging to the health-care system," said Ms. Mehar.

"Generally, physicians in these types of clinics aim for a patient load of about 200 to 400 patients. That compares to

1,500 to 2,000 patients in the public system.

"So if even 10 per cent of Ontario's doctors opted for this type of private practice, many more patients would have access to primary health care while a few wealthy people are over-served."

The in-house physician for La Vie, Dr. Sannoufi, counters that he works hours at a publicly-funded clinic and emergency rooms across Ontario, including rural hospitals in Barry's Bay and Smiths Falls where doctors are desperately needed.

Likewise, all of ExecHealth's doctors work in the public system and offer their services to ExecHealth during their off-time.

Mr. Shah said ExecHealth and the other clinics are perfectly legal because they only provide services not offered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan. This means there's no conflict with the Canada Health Act, which says clinics can't charge for anything already paid for by the government.

"The big difference between our services and OHIP is that we focus on preventative care, which is different from what family doctors do," Mr. Shah said.

Dr. Sannoufi added that at La Vie, he doesn't just hand out medication. Rather, he addresses the underlying cause of problems – many of which are lifestyle-based. This is something doctors in the OHIP system typically don't have time to do.

"It's a challenge. (In the public system) how much you get paid all depends on how many people you see per hour," Dr. Sannoufi said. "In my personal opinion, that affects our quality of work. For me, (opening La Vie) was more of a personal goal for my career.

"I really want to spend the time that I believe people deserve."

Mr. Nyman said the fact that his family physician didn't catch his gallbladder issue is not a slight on his doctor. But he didn't discuss all his health issues when he saw his doctor, he said, which was very infrequently.

That scenario, according to Mr. Shah, is all too common.

"These are busy people. I don't know if Mr. Nyman would have had the time to sit in a waiting room for three hours to check out what he thought was heartburn. At our clinic, the average wait time is 15 seconds in the waiting room," said Mr. Shah.

"If you were to go to your lawyer's office and wait two, three hours, they wouldn't be your lawyer very long."

***By Julie Fortier***