

Hospital staff gets virtual house calls via Stat Doctors

By Sonja Haller

THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

An entrepreneur doctor with Scottsdale Healthcare recently began arranging virtual "house calls" to the hospital system's employees.

Emergency-room physician Alan Roga signed on Scottsdale Healthcare in December as his biggest client and is in discussions with other health-care providers as part of the new Scottsdale start-up called Stat Health Services (statdoc.com).

Stat Doctors joins other online companies such as RingADoc and MDLiveCare in diagnosing and prescribing medication for common conditions over the Internet or the phone.

Roga says the focus of his business is to deal with a company's employees by providing this supplemental health care, as opposed to other virtual medicine models that cater to time-pressed individuals.

An employee can register with the site to be "seen" at any hour day or night.

Within 30 minutes, the patient will get an alert from a doctor, many of them emergency-room physicians, about the time of their appointment. The patient and doctor can talk over the Internet, through video conferencing if available to the patient or by phone at the time of the appointment.



Alan Roga

Scottsdale Healthcare hopes the new program will keep a portion of its 10,000 employees from jamming the emergency room during the busy season with minor conditions.

Nationwide, about 55 percent of emergency-room visits are non-emergencies and Scottsdale Healthcare spokesman Keith Jones said it's a "small, but not insignificant number of employees using the ER for minor medical conditions."

Jones said the program may save Scottsdale Healthcare costs in lost work time.

"If it's the middle of the night or the weekend and the person has a sore throat or fever or sinus headache, they can have a virtual visit," Jones said. "They can get a needed prescription for antibiotics and if it's the weekend, they can be back to work by their next shift."

Scottsdale Healthcare could not yet provide how many employees have enrolled in the program. Jones said it will take at least a year to assess the success of the program measured by gains in employee work time and fewer unnecessary emergency-room visits.

Clare Copeland, a supervisor of emergency registration at Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn Medical Center, enrolled because the program looked easy to use and convenient.

"It made sense personally and professionally," Copeland said. "A lot of people use the ER when they don't need it and they don't need to spend the money on an ER co-pay. And if you have to wait 30 minutes, say you have a massive migraine, instead of waiting in an urgent

care with a bunch of sick people with the lights and noises, you can stay home and relax and wait for your appointment."

For Scottsdale Healthcare employees, a Stat Doctors co-pay is less than 25 percent of an ER co-pay or about half of out of pocket over urgent care. Copeland's co-pay for an emergency room visit is \$150.

Among the conditions that Stat Doctors treats are asthma, sinusitis, bronchitis, allergies, pink eye, urinary tract infections and sore throats. Prescriptions are sent electronically to a patient's pharmacy of choice.

When an employee sets up his Stat Doctors account, he is prompted to complete an electronic record that notes history, allergies and medications.

Roga said safeguards are in place to prevent harmful or needless prescriptions.

"There are a couple things in place. Our prescription policies call for no DEA-controlled substances and no lifestyle drugs," he said.