The Doctor Will See You Now??

Recently, a friend of mine went out to his car late one night to run an errand, only to find that it would not start. He was immediately concerned as he had an early AM meeting that he couldn’t miss. He had just replaced the battery so knew it must be something else. Knowing nothing of cars, he did what any of us would do, he Googled it. One brief phrase – “Infiniti QX56 won’t start battery new”—and presto, up popped three online mechanics, one at $15, one at $25, and one at $45. Choosing the middle of the range, he clicked on the link and there was his trusty online mechanic at 11:30 PM to answer his questions and hopefully solve his dilemma. After a brief history of the problem, the mechanic quickly shared with him what he thought to be the most likely answer – it was a relay switch. Fortunate for him, this particular model has 6 other relays that are identical, one of which was to the fog lights. The fix was simple; he would just need to switch out the two parts. Knowing that my friend was not adept in the ways of car repair, the mechanic, e-mailed him a diagram of where to find the correct part, he switched it out, and like magic, his car started up. Thirty minutes after getting online – Problem solved.

As I thought about this story, it made me wonder about how we continue to care for patients today. My physician’s office is one of the very few places in my life that I have to wait for an appointment in order to receive the information I want or need. A friend of mine called last week for an appointment as a new patient with a specialist she needed to see. First available appointment – 6 weeks.

Much of the discussion we are seeing is about how physicians must change the way
we practice in response to healthcare reform and the new law. Although that is undeniably true, there are other forces of change at work in the world of healthcare. Given that nearly everything else in our lives has become designed around immediate access, it is only a matter of time until physician practices must find a way to get on board.

- New models of care, using social media tools and immediate access such as hellohealth are emerging. Follow @jayparkinson on twitter to see more.

- Jennifer Shyne Dyer, MD, [@endogoddess] is using texts and tweets to monitor her diabetic patients.

- The Mayo Clinic recently launched its new Center for Social Media with the tagline Bringing the Social Media Revolution to Healthcare.

If physicians are to survive and thrive in this new healthcare world, they will need to join in this “revolution,” developing new and creative ways to care for their patients and make information immediately available to them. How long will it be till your patients are really able to see you...now?