

**- Watching your Health -  
- with Peter LoPresti -**

People often seek a doctor when they have pain. One of the first questions they ask is: "What caused this pain?"

Some types of pain is easy to understand. A slip and fall, hitting your thumb with a hammer, or an auto accident are examples of a sudden (acute) injury, and patients understand why pain is a result.

More difficult is a pain that results from slower (chronic) injuries.

Just as decay of a tooth can take weeks or years before reaching the sensitive nerve and symptoms appear, or build up of a vascular disease can lead to a heart attack, many activities over time can place strain on the neck and back creating spinal decay before nerves become irritated and pain or other symptoms become obvious.

Some people equate "no pain" with "no problem," but just as regular dental check ups should be a part of your healthy lifestyle, periodic check ups for your neck and back can help identify small problems before they become big ones.

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**Low Cost Medical Care Does Not Mean 'Cut Rate',  
Cutting Corners, or Diminished Care**

Christine Wilson has been providing family health care services to smaller towns throughout Northern California for more than 40 years. She has worn out more than several cares driving to towns like Dos Palos and Doris (yes, there is a Doris California) to provide a medical presence for patients living in towns too small to have their own medical facilities, or even something as basic as paramedic support for anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500 people.

She has always practiced in what some might consider the fringes of civilization here in the United States. But in 2004, she decided to fulfill a life-long dream and become an independent, home town source for family medical services. She came home to Orangevale, and established the Orangevale Family Medical Clinic, Inc.

In these days of "big medicine," HMO's, and medical office "chain of gatekeepers," arranging a conversation with Wilson was a welcome surprise. There's a receptionist, and there is Christine.

"When someone is hurting, or in distress, they need care - both physically and emotionally. Sure, we have to gather all the information necessary to provide informed exam and diagnosis, but quite often I take care of this in the course of an examination," says Christine.

"I believe medicine should always be about people first. And, I also believe that health care should be readily available to anyone. With most clinics - even many hospitals, and definitely HMOs, if you don't have insurance (or aren't members), they won't see you."

Orangevale Family Medical Clinic welcomes cash patients. They allow Christine to keep costs down.

"When you are billing insurance, the costs of providing services can be as high as three and four times because of the billing process. It can require a full-time staff mem-

ber who does nothing but billing," Christine informs us.

This does not mean the clinic will not take Medicare, Blue Cross, or other insurers, or will not accept credit cards (they accept VISA, MC, Discover, and AMEX). But the major rule is to keep the patient's cost as low as possible while maintaining high-quality care.

Much of the baseline lab work is also initiated 'in house' (Like it was when I was a kid). "We do the blood draws here and send them to the lab. The cost to the patient is usually half - or less - of sending them to a specialized testing facility."

Another surprise; in many cases the needed medicines are available through patient assistance programs. "I will be the first person to tell them about the lower costs available through Costco, Sam's Club, or WalMart."

What about services available?

"We are an out-patient facility - in effect, we are the first line for non-critical care, and often the first step for more critical needs. It may only take us a minute or two to identify a seemingly minor problem as something more serious that require immediate intervention. When this happens, we actually call the hospital and give them a heads-up so they are ready when the patient comes through the door. It can save a four-to-six hour wait in an ER lobby."

During the interview, we also learned that the clinic is one of the few facilities in the area where all the personnel are fully bi-lingual (English / Spanish).

"It raises the level of patient comfort to be able to speak directly to me on a lot of private subjects instead of having to work through another stranger (an interpreter).

Clinic hours are 9:00 am to 5:00 pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday; 9:00 am to 7:00 pm on Wednesday; and 10:00 am to 1:00 pm on Saturday (by appointment).

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