

# Doctors open direct primary care clinic in Maine

By Rose Lundy

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After about 15 years in different health care settings in Maine, Brad Tuttle and his wife, Alley, decided to leave traditional health care and start Apotheosis Health, a direct primary care clinic in Bangor. They said they saw a "big collapse coming."

And now, with President Trump having signed a bill passed by Congress that would cut nearly \$1 trillion in spending on Medicaid over the next decade, Tuttle said the system is at further risk of "erosion."

"We're teetering on the edge already right now and if you come in and take \$800 billion from Medicaid (as was initially proposed), we're in serious trouble," Brad said.

Brad said direct primary care clinics are better positioned to endure cuts to Medicaid because they do not work with insurance, instead they bill patients directly.

Apotheosis Health is one of a growing number of direct primary care clinics across Maine. There are currently at least 30, more than half of which have opened in the last five years, according to DPC Nation.

Before opening their clinic, the Tuttles were both working in oncology and grew frustrated by insurance companies issuing denials, requiring treatment lines that weren't preferable and dictating which medicine they could use.

The couple wanted to find a way to make more of a difference

for their patients, and decided primary care was the best place to start. Primary care is the first line of defense for health care, but it's also been struggling with recruitment.

The major difference between hospital-based and direct primary care, Brad said, is how many patients providers take on. Apotheosis Health caps their practice at 500 patients (they have about 50 so far). A primary care provider at a hospital could have between 1,000 and 2,500, he said. (MaineHealth confirmed that its primary care providers typically have about 1,500 patients.)

In-take appointments can be 90 minutes and annual visits can be an hour or more, if a patient would like. The couple are also

available by call or text 24/7 via a HIPAA compliant phone app, Alley said. They charge \$90 a month for individuals, with discounts for couples and families. The payment covers unlimited visits, including an annual physical, annual labs, free or discounted antibiotics as well as any necessary follow-up visits.

Steven Michaud, president of the Maine Hospital Association, said direct primary care is a good option as part of the larger health care mix but "that said, it doesn't do much for those that can't afford it."

This is a misconception, according to Dr. Jack Forbush, one of the first in Maine to provide direct primary care. Of the 1,200 patients at his Hampden clinic, Forbush said about 95 percent

are blue collar workers, and 80 percent don't have any health insurance.

When Dr. Forbush converted his private practice to direct primary care in 2013, he said he was "flooded" with people who couldn't get access to primary care. His patients, said Dr. Forbush, are drawn to the clinic because they say it's accessible, affordable, and provides continuity of care.

Apotheosis Health also has a walk-in urgent care clinic and an infusion clinic, both open to anyone. Urgent care visits cost \$150 and fluids cost \$100. The goal, Brad said, is to help reduce emergency room visits by improving preventative care and offering relief through the urgent care clinic.