
Keeping your CEOs and leaders full of vim and vigor

Guide to choosing an executive health program

Craig Cheifetz, MD, FACP

Maggie Hayford, RN

Executives and top-level employees are crucial to an organization's healthy bottom line. Trends show that keeping key players fit is becoming a high priority. With today's confusing terms about executive health, concierge medicine and the like, how can HR and benefits leaders confidently select a program that will help them ensure the good health of its leaders?

This piece will educate decision-makers about what to look for and what to avoid, with industry insights on how to choose the healthcare program best suited to meet the needs of its most essential people.

Understanding the jargon, defining the services

VIP Medicine is a somewhat vague, overlapping term that can encompass an entire host of medical services, from the limited to the very expansive. Because it's not a precise term, you should fully investigate what any program or practice that uses it is actually offering.

Concierge Medicine is a common term that has come to represent

what should be known as "**Subscription Medicine.**"

In **Subscription Medicine**, the individual usually pays an annual out-of-pocket "access fee" or dues that guarantee better access to a physician practice. Services can vary from direct 24/7 access, to appointments quickly scheduled within a set period, or a combination of both. The access fee enables the doctor to limit the number of patients that he or she accepts into their practice, thus allowing each patient more time with the physician. For example, instead of overseeing 4,000 patients, a physician might limit their practice to only 600. Practices that use this model are generally

primary-care physician practices. **Executive Healthcare** is another vague term that can represent any one of these previously described models. Sometimes it's just a title that a practitioner will use to label his or her practice.

Boutique Medicine is a term that can overlap with many of the terms above. Often, boutique centers provide a combination of health screening and spa services, with or without an affiliated primary-care practice. These centers can meet a mixture of needs, ranging from medical assessments to relaxation and massage, and in some cases may be part of a resort package.

Executive Healthcare Screening Programs are designed to comprehensively assess an individual's healthcare needs in a short period. Such assessments may last anywhere from a half day to several days, depending on their design. Advertising language aside, a longer assessment is not necessarily a better assessment. These programs are typically found at major medical centers or larger clinics that have been established solely for this purpose.

A typical Executive Health Center might offer:

- Comprehensive medical and family history review
- Coronary health risk profile
- Chest X-ray
- Treadmill stress testing by a board-certified cardiologist
- Extensive laboratory testing
- Thorough fitness evaluation
- Pulmonary function testing
- Vision and hearing evaluations
- Nutritional assessment

Optional screening tests can include colonoscopy, CT scan, mammography, ultrasound and DEXA scans. It is also important to note that just because a test is offered it may not be indicated or appropriate for all clients. These tests should be available for those in whom they are indicated according to best evidence guidelines.

Now That You Can Talk the Talk ... Ask the Question: Prevention via Screening, Primary Care Treatment — or the Works?

The terms above can be divided into two categories: screening or preventative services, and primary-care services. Many centers say they offer both a comprehensive health screening service and subscription medicine practice, but most concentrate on one more than the other. Some subscription medicine

practices will claim that they can do what a screening center does, but the actual assessment may consist of nothing more than a standard yearly physical.

What to Look for, What to Avoid

As noted above, due to the overlapping of terms used by providers, it is important to first confirm that the center you are evaluating matches your needs. It is also important to be clear about centers that may offer a mixture of services, from assessment for disease and illness, to preventive healthcare and wellness. The ideal center will address all of these areas.

Scope of Services

When searching for a program in executive healthcare, most people ask, “What does the program offer?” It is important to note that more is not always better — for example, some tests carry a substantial physical, psychological or social risk to the patient and should be performed only when necessary.

It’s also vital to ask, “Who decides which tests are conducted?” Physicians train for years to develop their knowledge and skills. When a salesperson drives the choice of services to a client without sound clinical reasoning, buyer beware! The best programs will involve a full explanation from a physician about why particular tests should or should not be included

in the assessment. If you find a program that refuses to perform a requested test (even one that you are willing to pay for) because the risks outweigh the benefit, you have probably found a sound and reputable program. A good program should always include an extensive patient history and physical examination that includes ample time with the physician, and should include tests that are medically indicated based on a client’s age, risk factors and demographics.

Scheduling

Some required tests, such as a colonoscopy, might not be conducted during the initial visit. One should ask the extent to which the center is willing to help schedule follow up tests to assure continued care. When evaluating a program, ask about the center’s ability to arrange for urgent tests or services, if acute or rapid intervention is required. A reputable center will be able to describe this ability clearly and give examples of previous successes.

Location, Location, Location

Attending a program located outside your geographical region may make it difficult for the medical provider to help arrange follow-up or emergency care, should it be required. For a far more efficient and satisfying experience, look for a qualified center within your region. Ask about the center’s ability to connect you with a primary physician and

specialty care. A successful center develops healthy relationships within its entire physician community.

Time is Money: How Much of Your Busy Executive's Is Required?

One notable difference between centers involves efficiency. Ask if your executives will see multiple physician specialists, or one primary physician who will thoroughly assess them. Programs that include multiple physician specialists typically take much longer, requiring patients to walk from office to office throughout the day.

Also ask about the time allotted for such specialty evaluations, the travel/wait time between office visits, and whether ongoing relationships will be established with the same physician specialists afterwards. If your executive will require future visits with a specialist, it is best to continue seeing the same specialist rather than be referred to another. This is another reason why location is so important.

Returning Customers

Centers that focus on providing comprehensive evaluations that also include client-centered wellness goals and plans of action will have a devoted following and a high rate of returning customers each year. Ask about a center's customer retention and return rates.

Reviewing of Test Results

One of the most important aspects of an executive health-screening program involves reviewing and interpreting the results of the assessment with the client. Though most programs will review data and provide a general overall assessment on the same day as the encounter, a few centers (typically the ones that focus on evidence-based medicine) will conduct an additional and more-detailed consultation with the client between one to two months after the first encounter, either in person or by phone.

Ask if a detailed consultation is available after your initial visit and, if so, whether it includes a second complete review and interpretation of all medical studies performed. Patients should fully understand their health status as they implement their plan of action. Ask if this consultation allows adequate time for questions and discussions surrounding any lifestyle changes that may be needed or have been initiated after the first visit. Ask if patients will receive specific "next steps" for any needed follow-up care.

Ask About Reporting

Another indicator of a program's quality is what it provides to the client in writing. Though some programs may produce fancy packaging, it is the written explanation, geared toward enhancing the client's knowledge, which ultimately determines a

program's quality. Reports to the client should include all test results, thoroughly understandable interpretations, recommendations for lifestyle modifications, and instructions about any needed follow-up care.

Program Flexibility

Is the center able to individualize comprehensive health and wellness goals for each client? Successful programs will develop customized implementation plans based on individual lifestyles, work and home environments, and social, psychological and ethnic factors. The flexibility of a center speaks to the quality and capabilities of its physicians and staff.

Schedules and Efficiency

Most clients do not want relaxation or down time during their visit; they want to keep things as efficient as possible. That said, a good program allows the flexibility for clients to check their messages or take a meal break if desired. Many of the most efficient centers can complete the assessment in less than five hours, enabling the client to schedule the health screening during their workday with greater ease.

Are You Among Good Company?

Successful centers will have client lists made up of individuals, trade organizations and Fortune 500 companies. Ask for a client list.

Interview the Medical Team

If a program won't allow you to meet with the medical team in advance, it's probably not a program worth pursuing. Ask a center's medical providers how they make their decisions to include or exclude specific tests. Pay close attention to whether their decision-making is evidence-based. Be diligent; review the education and background of the clinicians. The Internet, which carries a great deal of information on healthcare practitioners, is a good place to start.

The Seven-Step Solution for continuity of care subscription programs:

1. Ask about fees. The first question that any prospective client should ask is about the fee structure of the practice, and what the client receives for that fee. Most practices where there is a continuity of care charge an "access fee," which guarantees that the client will receive prompt appointments as well as extended interaction with the physician. By law, most insurance co-pays and insurance collections still apply.

2. Ask about access. Ask about "after-hours" coverage and who responds to phone calls. Most programs should offer access to a physician and a specified time

within which calls will be returned. Generally, one hour response times are acceptable but of course shorter response times are better. Some practices offer after-hours coverage with the same doctor all the time. These are typically the smaller or solo practices; the critical factor is the physician's accessibility.

3. Ask about relationships with other physicians. Clients may find it beneficial to choose practices that have strong, established relationships with either a multi-specialty group or an entire healthcare system. This can greatly enhance the practice's ability to help the client obtain tests and procedures that may be needed outside the practice's standard scope of services.

4. Consider physician credentials and experience. Always research the credentials and backgrounds of the physicians, both within the practice as well as via state healthcare databases, for information regarding the quality of care provided. In most cases, finding nothing is a good thing!

5. Evaluate customer service. When visiting one of these practices, pay attention to how courteous and responsive they are. You may be able to evaluate their phone skills or observe other personal interactions while visiting.

6. Watch out for add-ons. Be aware of gimmicks and add-ons, which usually indicate that a practice may be trying to sell other products or build an additional revenue stream. These are often unnecessary and can become a turn-off to clients.

7. Ask for references. Ask practices for current clients that you may contact to ask about their level of satisfaction with the practice.

Craig Cheifetz, MD, FACP
Medical Director
Inova Corporate 360°

Maggie Hayford, RN
Clinical Manager
Inova Corporate 360°

For more information, contact Dr. Cheifetz at 703-776-7005.

Inova Corporate 360°
Inova Fairfax Hospital Campus
3300 Gallows Rd.
Falls Church, VA 22042
