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TELEPHONE CONSULT POLICY – EXISTING PATIENTS

Existing patients of HeartCare (for whom we have done a thorough, first time consultation) sometimes ask why the doctor “can’t just call me and go over my labs?” We have had many requests for a policy about this, so we have thought about why we don’t do this except in special circumstances, why we charge a high price in advance, and advise against it in general.

To prepare to see a patient in the office, the staff and Dr. Wong review the chart and he decides whether it is time for an EKG or other study, based on the individual risks and problems we are watching. The last lab test is put on our flow sheet, calculating ratios that we have decided are significant. We use this to see how the medications and lifestyle modifications we have advised are working, and we can tell how compliant the patient has been. We do not do this preparatory work if a patient does not have an appointment, nor would we chart everything in a casual phone call.

Besides weight and blood pressure, there are several assessments and procedures that are only possible when we see the patient here: an EKG, impedance study (fluid levels for certain patients), or ultrasound. Also, we can tell by a patient’s demeanor and questions whether our advice is comprehended; we often ask a patient to bring a spouse, caregiver, children, or significant other so our discussions of diet and exercise can be understood and supported by those directly involved. Because cardiovascular disease is mostly an invisible process, the doctor often does a physical exam with a stethoscope to listen to possible indicators of plaque in the arteries.

We ask patients to return more often where compliance to medication or lifestyle is not consistent. We want patients to take advice seriously and to see how their blood chemistry is changing, and it is our experience that this is done most effectively in person. We would not go over labs on the phone in a casual call, without all this preparation or charting thereafter, because it is very possible we might miss something. Also, since this is a busy practice, our first priority is those patients who have made an appointment, come to the office, and are focused on what they are here to do.

There are a few patients who have no alternative, for example, those who live abroad; there are others we have seen for many years, who are good reporters, who are overall compliant, who have found the medications and lifestyle changes that are working for them. There are a few others who are not in either of these groups but who do not want to travel to get here, and would rather pay for the telephone consultation, but they should realize that we and they might very well be missing something.

A telephone consultation is \$195 payable in advance. We know this is expensive but in part we want people to take the consultation seriously, make an appointment, and have their questions ready. We usually spend ten minutes on a telephone consult. Thank you for understanding our concerns.