

Going to the Doctor: Healthcare Around the World

Getting sick is never fun, and going to the doctor works differently around the world. In some countries, a visit is almost free. In other countries, people must **afford** the cost themselves, and it can get expensive. When you notice a strange **symptom**, like a fever or sore throat, your first stop is often a small local **clinic**. A doctor there can give simple **treatment** for common problems like colds or a cough. If your problem is bigger, the clinic sends you somewhere else. Every country has built its own health system, and none work the same way. Some systems are fast and **convenient**; others take longer. This article looks at three systems and how each changes a doctor's visit.

Many countries offer a public health system that people do not pay for directly. The government collects money through a **tax** and uses it to **fund** hospitals and clinics nationwide. Every **citizen** can walk into a doctor's office without a wallet. This system sounds perfect, but it has one common problem: waiting. Because care is free, clinics can get very busy. Getting an **appointment** might take days or weeks if the problem is not urgent. A small **delay** for a routine visit is normal, though serious conditions get seen faster. Countries like Canada and the United Kingdom use this system, and most citizens are happy to trade a short wait for care that never costs money directly.

Other countries use a different model built around private **insurance**. People or their jobs pay money every month for health **coverage**, which helps pay for visits later. This monthly payment is called a **premium**, and it can be costly, especially for a family. When someone visits the doctor, the office later sends a **bill** to the insurance company, not to the patient. Many workers get help paying for insurance through their **employer**, who covers part of the cost as a job benefit. People without insurance can face huge bills for even a simple visit. The United States uses this system, and patients often get care quickly, though cost remains one of the biggest worries for families.

No matter which system a country uses, most people start with a family doctor, who knows their health history and handles common problems first. If a case is complicated, the family doctor gives a **referral**, a note that sends the patient to see a **specialist**, a doctor who focuses on one part of the body, like the heart or eyes. Before sending you forward, your doctor will usually **consult** with you about your symptoms and ask careful questions. This helps the doctor **diagnose** the problem correctly before choosing the next step. Many people also visit their family doctor once a year for a general **checkup**, since it can catch small problems early.

When a health problem cannot wait, people go straight to the hospital **emergency** room. Doctors there treat serious problems like a broken bone, chest pain, or a sudden **injury**. Emergency rooms never close, and the **staff** working there are trained to handle almost anything, day or night. In many countries, though, emergency rooms have become very **crowded**, especially in big cities, with long lines common on a busy night. Part of the problem is a **shortage** of trained nurses and doctors compared to how many patients need help. Some hospitals now use separate fast-track areas for smaller problems, helping serious cases get seen sooner.

Technology is starting to change how people see a doctor. Instead of driving to an office, many patients now have a **virtual** appointment through video on a phone or computer. This is especially helpful for people in **remote** towns, far from any big hospital. A doctor can review your symptoms and even send a prescription without you leaving home. Some patients now wear a small **device** that tracks their heart rate or blood pressure all day. Doctors can **monitor** this information from far away and catch a problem

before the patient feels sick. This new kind of **access** to healthcare is growing fast, and many experts believe it will only grow in the future.

Beyond the Headlines

Here's something fun: doctors have not always used modern medicine! In **ancient** Egypt, doctors used honey to help wounds heal, since honey can fight certain **germs**. Later, people in many cultures used **herbal** plants to treat pain, fevers, and stomach problems, and many of today's medicines came from these old plant ideas. One bold **pioneer**, Edward Jenner, decided to **invent** the world's first vaccine in 1796, using material from a mild disease to protect people from a deadly one. His risky idea eventually saved millions of lives. So next time you visit a doctor's office, remember: modern medicine grew from thousands of years of brave experiments.

Vocabulary

Paragraph 1

afford (v.)	(v.) to have enough money to pay for something. <i>"She saved money so she could afford a new bike."</i>
symptom (n.)	(n.) a sign in your body that shows you are sick. <i>"A cough can be a symptom of a cold."</i>
clinic (n.)	(n.) a small place where people go to see a doctor. <i>"He walked to the clinic for a quick checkup."</i>
treatment (n.)	(n.) care or medicine given to help someone get better. <i>"The doctor gave her treatment for a sore throat."</i>
convenient (adj.)	(adj.) easy to use, with little trouble or delay. <i>"A clinic near her house is very convenient."</i>

Paragraph 2

tax (n.)	(n.) money that people pay to the government. <i>"The city uses tax money to build roads."</i>
fund (v.)	(v.) to give money to pay for something. <i>"The government will fund a new school."</i>
citizen (n.)	(n.) an official member of a country. <i>"Every citizen has the right to vote."</i>
appointment (n.)	(n.) a planned time to meet someone, like a doctor. <i>"I have an appointment with the dentist at noon."</i>
delay (n.)	(n.) extra time before something happens. <i>"There was a short delay before the train left."</i>

Paragraph 3

insurance (n.)	(n.) a plan that helps pay for costs like doctor visits. <i>"His insurance paid most of the hospital bill."</i>
coverage (n.)	(n.) the amount or type of help an insurance plan gives. <i>"Her plan offers good coverage for medicine."</i>
premium (n.)	(n.) the money paid regularly for an insurance plan. <i>"They pay a monthly premium for their insurance."</i>
bill (n.)	(n.) a paper that shows how much money is owed. <i>"The clinic sent a bill in the mail."</i>
employer (n.)	(n.) a person or company that gives someone a job. <i>"Her employer pays part of her insurance cost."</i>

Paragraph 4

referral (n.)	(n.) a note from a doctor that sends a patient to another doctor. <i>"My doctor wrote a referral to see a specialist."</i>
specialist (n.)	(n.) a doctor who focuses on one part of the body. <i>"A heart specialist checked his test results."</i>

consult (v.)	(v.) to talk with someone to get advice or information. <i>"The doctor will consult with you before any test."</i>
diagnose (v.)	(v.) to find out what illness a person has. <i>"It took two tests to diagnose the problem."</i>
checkup (n.)	(n.) a regular visit to make sure a person is healthy. <i>"She gets a checkup every year."</i>

Paragraph 5

emergency (n.)	(n.) a sudden, serious problem that needs help right away. <i>"Call for help if there is an emergency."</i>
injury (n.)	(n.) damage or harm to a part of the body. <i>"A doctor treated his injury after the fall."</i>
staff (n.)	(n.) the group of people who work at a place. <i>"The hospital staff worked all night."</i>
crowded (adj.)	(adj.) full of many people. <i>"The waiting room was very crowded on Monday."</i>
shortage (n.)	(n.) not having enough of something that is needed. <i>"The hospital has a shortage of nurses."</i>

Paragraph 6

virtual (adj.)	(adj.) happening on a screen instead of in person. <i>"They had a virtual meeting on the computer."</i>
remote (adj.)	(adj.) far away from a city or large town. <i>"She lives in a remote village in the mountains."</i>
device (n.)	(n.) a small machine or tool made for a job. <i>"He wears a device that tracks his steps."</i>
monitor (v.)	(v.) to watch or check something over time. <i>"Nurses monitor the heart rate of every patient."</i>
access (n.)	(n.) the chance or ability to use or reach something. <i>"Fast internet gives people access to online doctors."</i>

Beyond the Headlines

ancient (adj.)	(adj.) from a very long time ago. <i>"The museum has ancient tools from Egypt."</i>
germs (n.)	(n.) tiny living things that can cause sickness. <i>"Washing your hands helps kill germs."</i>
herbal (adj.)	(adj.) made from plants, used for health or taste. <i>"She drank herbal tea to feel better."</i>
pioneer (n.)	(n.) a person who is first to try a new idea. <i>"She was a pioneer in modern medicine."</i>
invent (v.)	(v.) to make or think of something new. <i>"Scientists worked for years to invent the vaccine."</i>

Language Review

Exercise A — True or False

Read each statement. Write True or False on the line.

1. In some countries, a doctor visit is almost free. _____
2. In a public health system, citizens pay the doctor directly after every visit. _____
3. Waiting for an appointment can take longer in a public health system. _____
4. In the private insurance system, employers never help pay for insurance costs.

5. A family doctor can give a patient a referral to see a specialist. _____
6. Emergency rooms close every night so the staff can rest. _____
7. A shortage of doctors and nurses can make emergency rooms crowded. _____
8. Virtual appointments let people see a doctor without visiting an office. _____

Exercise B — Matching

Match each word in Column A with its meaning in Column B. Write the correct letter.

Column A	Column B
1. afford	a. a small machine or tool made for a job
2. citizen	b. an official member of a country
3. referral	c. tiny living things that can cause sickness
4. specialist	d. to have enough money to pay for something
5. shortage	e. a doctor who focuses on one part of the body
6. virtual	f. not having enough of something that is needed
7. device	g. a note that sends a patient to another doctor
8. germs	h. happening on a screen instead of in person

Exercise C — Multiple Choice

Choose the best answer (a, b, c, or d) for each question.

1. What do people usually visit first for a small health problem?
 - a. A hospital emergency room
 - b. A health insurance office
 - c. A small local clinic
 - d. A specialist's office
2. How do public health systems mostly get their money to pay for care?

- a. Monthly insurance premiums
 - b. Taxes collected by the government
 - c. Direct payment from patients
 - d. Money from employers only
3. What is a common problem in public health systems, according to the article?
- a. Too few hospitals
 - b. Very high monthly bills
 - c. No family doctors at all
 - d. Longer waiting times for appointments
4. In the private insurance system described, what is the monthly payment called?
- a. A premium
 - b. A tax
 - c. A referral
 - d. A checkup
5. What does a referral from a family doctor allow a patient to do?
- a. Avoid seeing any doctor
 - b. See a specialist for a specific problem
 - c. Skip paying for insurance
 - d. Get a virtual appointment only
6. According to the article, what is one reason emergency rooms can become crowded?
- a. Too many small clinics nearby
 - b. Too much new medical technology
 - c. Too many virtual appointments
 - d. A shortage of trained doctors and nurses
7. What can a small wearable device help a doctor do?
- a. Monitor a patient's health from far away
 - b. Write a prescription automatically
 - c. Collect taxes for hospitals
 - d. Replace the family doctor completely
8. Who is credited with inventing the first vaccine in 1796?
- a. An ancient Egyptian healer
 - b. A modern medical specialist
 - c. Edward Jenner
 - d. A hospital staff nurse

Exercise D — Discussion Questions

Talk about these questions with a partner or in a small group.

1. Which type of healthcare system would you prefer to use, public or private? Why?

2. Have you ever had a virtual appointment with a doctor? What was it like?
3. Do you visit a doctor for a yearly checkup? Why or why not?
4. What do you think is the biggest healthcare problem in your country?
5. Would you want to wear a device that tracks your health every day? Why or why not?