

The virtual doctor will see you now

by *Adam Allington*

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STORY

Walgreens, the nation's largest retail pharmacy chain, has announced plans to provide virtual medical exams to patients [in 25 states by the end of the year](#).

The news is part of a larger trend of giving patients less expensive alternatives to a doctor's office visit.

Patients will be able to use the Walgreens mobile app to access doctors who can then write prescriptions for common ailments such as, say, pinkeye or a sinus infection.

Jon Linkous is CEO of the non-profit American Telemedicine Association. He says the growing trend will increase healthcare access and provide greater convenience.

"Patients who are now customers can look at this application and avoid the long waits that it might take for them to get an appointment at a primary care doctor as well as having to go into a waiting room filled with other sick people," Linkous says.

Walmart, CVS, and RiteAid are exploring plans to launch their own virtual clinics, but there are also risks. That is according to Andy Haig, director of e-Health at the University of Michigan.

"What's most important that people need to realize is that primary care medicine is a book that is about 20,000 pages wide, and there is a reason for that," Haig says.

"This is a business model, it's not a quality model," he says. "A few major lawsuits may change things for the better, and I'm hoping that these large companies are smart enough to play the odds and be sure they have good quality and they place limits on their treatment."

UnitedHealthcare and Anthem are also [making plans](#) to roll out telemedicine services by next year.

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