

Enterprise

Primary wellness

Rittenhouse Women's Wellness Center believes in building relationships with patients

JOHN GEORGE | SENIOR REPORTER

Dr. Leslie Saltzman decided on a career early on.

"Even as a kid, I knew I wanted to be a doctor," said Saltzman, whose mother was a doctor. "I was always drawn to primary-care medicine. I like the idea of building long-term relationships with patients, rather than seeing them once for one complaint, then never seeing them again."

With the assistance of her husband Robert, the Saltzmans established the Rittenhouse Women's Wellness Center on Pine Street in Center City five years ago.

The practice's patient count in Philadelphia has grown to 8,450. Its staff has expanded to six physicians; two registered dietitians; three psychologists; three fitness specialists; and two aestheticians (cosmetologists who specialize in skin care).

Now, with the center expected to reach its full patient capacity later this year, Saltzman is getting ready to open a second center outside the city.

The new practice, which has 2,000 patients already signed up, is scheduled to open Feb. 4 in Narberth. A third practice site is in the planning stages.

Robert Saltzman, a business consultant (and one-time CDNow executive) with a background in the technology and medical-device industries, serves as CEO of the center.

He attributes its growth to a style of medicine that embraces many of the access perks associated with concierge medicine. Their center does not, however, require patients to pay a retainer fee — typically around \$2,000 — that physicians in concierge practices charge upfront so they can keep their practice size small.

Robert Saltzman said that with his wife determined to specialize in primary care, he decided to study the field of family medicine. He even recruited a team of graduate students from Drexel University to help with the research. His objective was to determine the best practice model that would help his wife make a living while also maintaining a balanced schedule.

"The underpinning of our model is taking care of the needs of physicians as much as the patients," he said.

Their goal, he said, was to determine a way to increase access to quality care without increasing costs.

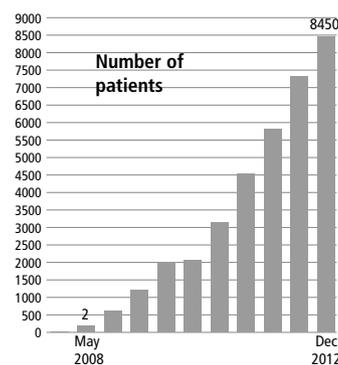
Elements like longer appointments appeal to both patients and doctors, neither of whom enjoy being at practices where, to enhance revenue, appointment slots are double-booked and



Dr. Leslie Saltzman poses in an examination room.

CURT HUBSON

Patient growth chart



doctors spend only a few minutes with patients. Rittenhouse Women's Wellness Center also sought to fill a void by focusing on women doctors providing care exclusively to women.

"The majority of primary-care doctors are male," said Robert Saltzman. "It's been a boys' club."

Leslie Saltzman developed the idea of expanding the practice to make wellness a major component. Nutrition services are provided to help women eat right; psychologists are on staff to help patients reduce stress and personal

The Saltzman way

At Rittenhouse Women's Wellness Center:

- ▶ Doctors spend one hour with a patient on her first visit.
- ▶ Follow up visits are typically 15 to 30 minutes.
- ▶ Patients don't have to wait more than 10 minutes to see a doctor.
- ▶ The practice has sufficient 'sick slots' so patients with an immediate medical need can be seen the same day.
- ▶ Office hours include nights and Saturdays.
- ▶ Wellness services offered at the center include nutrition, psychology, fitness, and skin care.

trainers work with patients on fitness. The center also features skin-care services such as laser treatments and injectable therapies like Botox.

Setting up the practice, Robert Saltzman said, required a seven-figure investment. Within two years the practice reached profitability, he said.

Spending more time with patients has helped the center (which is certified as a patient-centered medical home) meet quality indexes set by health insurers. Meeting those quality performance measurements has enabled the center

to receive higher reimbursement rates from managed-care companies.

Robert Saltzman said the additional wellness services have created multiple revenue streams, which also benefit the center's balance sheet.

The center continues to invest in technology, including electronic health records. "I call what we do Marcus Welby 2.0," he said.

The new Narberth center will occupy 4,000 square feet — much larger than the 2,500 square feet the Center Site site, which has a staff of 16 in a converted rowhouse. The Narberth site will have a staff of seven people. It also has an imaging center next door that will enhance the one-stop shopping approach that the center embraces.

Leslie Saltzman credits her husband with seeing the big picture when they developed the practice model.

"Bob was much more the visionary," she said. "I was more narrowly focused [on the clinical side], but now I love the business part of it. I love managing people."

Meanwhile, both continue to tinker with the model.

"We're still thinking about ways to make things better," Leslie Saltzman said. "I always think of this as a work in progress." ■