

I was taken aback at how difficult it was to gain access to primary health care when I moved to the United States in 2005. Even in the self-described "Health Care City" of New Brunswick, NJ-- home to Johnson & Johnson's headquarters, the Robert Wood Johnson Hospital system & St. Peter's University Hospital-- booking time with a medical doctor in a pinch was always a challenge. Parents who've needed a prescription on a weekend, or desperately wanted to ensure that a cough was 'just a cold,' can surely identify with this experience.

I'm encouraged by what the Family Practice & Counseling Network (FPCN) is doing to alleviate this problem. The innovation of FPCN is that it takes existing resources-- nurse practitioner expertise and availability-- and leverages them in a new, accessible, and affordable way. One unique facet of this innovation is its demographic scope: nurse managed health care centers not only make medical expertise accessible for those of us who can afford to prioritize our health, but it also reaches an often ignored population: Philadelphia's uninsured & low-income residents. This seems like a great model for other urban municipalities.

As congress debates universal healthcare packages, nurse managed health care offers an implementable, sustainable way of increasing basic health access to all.