

# DOC-IN-A-BOX

WHAT ELSE COULD  
BIG-BOX STORES  
SELL? HEALTHCARE!

Everybody's made that quick dash into a big-box store on the drive home from the office. You know the drill: run in, pick up some dog food, grab a quart of milk, undergo a little surgery and you're back on your way.

Hang on. What?

It was bound to happen sooner or later. With HMOs in a cost spiral and 59 million Americans with no health insurance at all, retailers like Walgreens, Rite Aid and Target have sniffed an opportunity and moved into the healthcare business, opening up in-store medical clinics that'll do a surprising variety of things to your person—treating your pimples, testing for pregnancy and even suturing wounds shut. Five years ago, nobody knew what a "retail clinic" was; today, there are some 1,100 of them. Expect twice as many in the next four years.

It's not hard to see the logic here. Not only do these retailers get to charge for their services, but also "clinics provide additional retail revenue by significantly increasing store traffic," says Devon M. Herrick of the pro-business think tank National Center for Policy Analysis. The clinics also route customers (fresh prescriptions in hand) directly to the store's pharmacy counter, where the real money's made. "It's a trifecta of profit," says Kevin Hauser, CEO of digital-records company MedeFile, who's been warily watching the retail-clinic explosion. "This is probably one of the most brilliant marketing ideas ever."

And one of the most controversial. While studies have shown that "drive-thru doctors" generally provide a respectable level of care, the truth is that these clinics are seldom staffed by actual M.D.s and instead rely on nurses and physician assistants. Critics also charge that clinics replace the traditional doctor-patient relationship with an à la carte approach. "You're putting your healthcare into silos where nobody has ownership of you as an entire person," says Dr. Glen Stream, president-elect of the American Academy of Family Physicians, which officially opposes the ongoing expansion of services these retail clinics offer.

But, like it or not, the "doc-in-a-box" trend shows no signs of slowing down. Here's a look at the retailers wearing white coats.

—ROBERT KLARA

## CVS

### Asthma Monitoring [\$79]

**Name of operation:** MinuteClinic

**The setup:** CVS' marketing of its healthcare services—"Quick, Affordable, Convenient"—feels a bit fast food-like, but the clinic *does* boast a 95 percent customer satisfaction rating. MinuteClinic offers a range of treatments for everything from sprained ankles to jellyfish stings (an unlikely injury in most states but, hey, it's nice to know it's there if you need it).

**Market presence:** From its first store in 2004, MinuteClinic has grown to 500 locations in 26 states. The company plans to add 100 clinics a year for the next five years.

### Blister Treatment [\$79] @ cvs

## WAL★MART®

### Bladder Infection Treatment [\$65]

**Name of operation:** The Clinic at Walmart

**The setup:** No doubt cognizant of the attention it would draw by getting into the healthcare biz, Walmart leases its clinic space to "independent local hospitals or health systems that the community already knows and trusts," according to Walmart's corporate Web site. A routine "get well visit" ranges from relief for a sore throat to earwax removal. Walmart data shows that 55 percent of the people who show up for care have no health insurance, which makes the average visit cost of 50 bucks a boon for lots of people.

**Market presence:** By our count, 117 locations in 26 states



### Athletes Foot Treatment [\$59]

**Name of operation:** Target Clinic

**The setup:** Much like its fellow behemoth Walmart, Target was no doubt aware that getting into medicine would draw plenty of scrutiny, which is why the Web site is (forgive us) at pains to point out that its team adheres to the guidelines of the American Medical Association and a slew of other health watchdogs. Prices average \$59 for treatment of everything from an earache to pink eye.

**Market presence:** Target Clinics are now operating in Florida, Illinois, Minnesota and Maryland.



### Head Lice Removal [\$59]

**Name of operation:** Lindora Health Clinic

**The setup:** Rite Aid partnered with Lindora in 2006 to offer a range of healthcare services throughout Southern California. Lindora specializes in weight-loss programs, but you can get a variety of treatments here, from TB tests to treatment of colds, coughs and the flu.

**Market presence:** Right now, only nine units in California, making Rite Aid the smallest player on the retail-clinic landscape

### Acne Remedy [\$59] @ Rite Aid

### Upset Stomach Treatment [\$65] @ Walmart



### Wart Removal [\$85]

**Name of operation:** Take Care Clinic

**The setup:** As with most of these places, you don't need an appointment. Just show up, check in at the touch-screen kiosk and wait about 20 minutes to be seen. Walgreens will vaccinate you for chicken pox, administer a school physical and even remove your warts. A "patient support center" handles follow-up calls until 10:00 p.m.

**Market presence:** More than 350 Take Care Clinics have opened across the country.

### Burn Treatment [\$59] @ Target