

# Dr. Internet

By Joshua Kors



**Jay Parkinson** is using 21st-century technology to provide old-fashioned medical care.



Going to the doctor can be a pain. You wait a week for your appointment, then wait again in the waiting room. When you finally get to see the doctor, you're rushed in and out the door in just a few minutes.

Jay Parkinson is changing that. They call him Dr. Internet. He'll see you right away via the World Wide Web. E-mail, instant messaging, video chat—there are a host of ways to contact him.

"What people want is a doctor in their lives, someone they can turn to when they have a medical question," says Parkinson. "They want a relationship." The current

medical system, he says, doesn't allow for that, as doctors scurry from one appointment to the next, so they can care for a long list of patients. "The whole experience makes patients depressed. It leaves them looking for something different."

## WEB MD

Parkinson, 32, got his medical degree from Penn State University and served his medical residency at a hospital in New York City. He found himself frustrated by the rapid and impersonal medical care delivered at the hospital. So, soon after finishing his education, he set up a different kind of doctor's office in the

Williamsburg neighborhood of the city. Parkinson's patients rarely go there. Most of their symptoms, he says, can be diagnosed and treated immediately, over the Internet, without the hassle of visiting a doctor.

Got a red spot on your skin? E-mail Parkinson a high-resolution photo, and he'll tell you right away whether it's something harmless, like a pimple, or connect you with a *dermatologist* (skin doctor) who can tell you whether it's something serious.

Think you may have broken your ankle? Log on to Parkinson's secure Web site and tell him where it hurts and how you were injured. He'll soon tell you

whether it's a break or a *sprain* (partially torn ligament)—and whether you need to come by the office for treatment.

You can instant message him too. Describe your nagging cough to him via IM, and he may be able to tell you whether you have a cold or something more serious, such as *bronchitis* (an inflammation of the passages in the lungs).

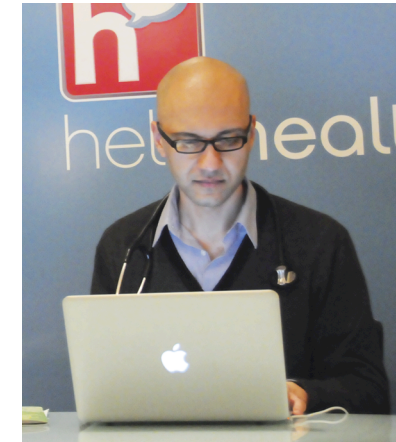
Parkinson even does something few doctors do anymore. For patients too sick to travel, he makes old-fashioned house calls.

## DIGITAL DOCTORS

Parkinson's medical service, Hello Health, has been open for only six months, but already it's catching on with locals. Patient Samantha Taylor joined Hello Health after developing *strep throat*, a bacterial infection of the throat and tonsils. "I've spent so much time in awful medical waiting rooms over the years," says Taylor. "Now, with Hello Health, I can get in right away. I spend as much time as I want with my doctor. And I can e-mail him anytime about my throat, and he gets back to me that night."

Parkinson says he is able to spend extra office time with the patients who need it because his office is structured differently. Most doctors have a staff of assistants, who book appointments, file medical papers, and bill insurance companies. Hello Health has no assistants. It's just Parkinson and three other doctors. Patients book appointments themselves through an online calendar. And all the office's medical documents are digital too. There are no paper files.

Using digital medical records gives the doctors a distinct edge, says Sean Khozin, a physician who cofounded Hello Health with Parkinson. Sometimes a doctor doesn't have all of a patient's paperwork at hand, says Khozin. But at Hello Health, the doctor



Sean Khozin examines a patient's medical records at the Hello Health office.

can pull up a patient's complete medical records with the click of a mouse and, he says, make a more informed diagnosis. "You have to wonder why other doctors' offices are still using pen and paper," he says. "It wastes resources and time." The minutes that Khozin saves locating and leafing through paper files enables him to spend extra time with patients. He gets to know them better, he says, which helps him provide them with better medical care.

## PUTTING PATIENTS FIRST

Some doctors have criticized the Internet approach. They wonder whether Web contact is a proper substitute for face-to-face care. Concerns like that, says Parkinson, arise with every advance in communications technology. "When the telephone was invented, doctors questioned whether consulting patients on the phone could be a substitute for seeing

them in person," he says. Now speaking to patients by phone is an essential part of a doctor's day. "What people need to understand," says Parkinson, "is that Internet care isn't in place of in-person care—it's in addition to it."

Susan Scharf used to have a traditional medical practice in New York City but was frustrated by the limited time she could spend with patients. Now she's hoping to join a Hello Health office planned for Manhattan. "I went into medicine to form relationships with patients," she says. "But the cost of running a traditional office is so high, you have to see lots of patients."

"The Hello Health model is different," adds Scharf. "With e-mailing and videoconferencing, you're communicating instantly with patients. You're putting them first." **CS**



Jay Parkinson makes house calls to patients who are too sick to visit his office.