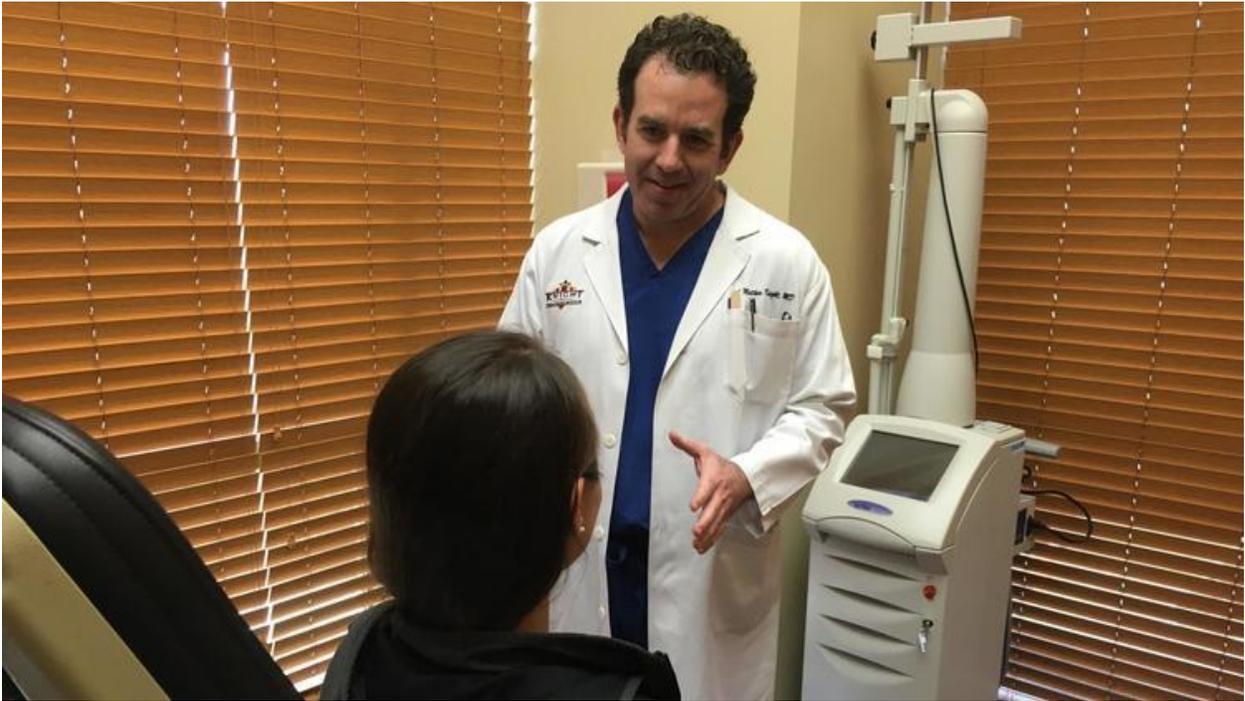


# Network helps Central Florida doctors stay independent



Dr. J. Matthew Knight of Knight Dermatology Institute in Orlando says being a part of IP Network has helped him remain independent. (katie dagenais)

In the era of uncertainty and a rapidly changing health-care system, a group of doctors in Central Florida have joined together so they can stay independent.

More than 1,100 primary-care doctors, specialists and health-care providers in six counties make up the Integrated Independent Physicians Network, or IP Network, which was established less than two years ago by a local orthopedic hand surgeon.

"We started the network because we realized that medicine is changing from a fee-for-service model to a shared savings model," said Dr. George White, founder and president of the IP Network.

Partly driven by the Affordable Care Act to rein in health-care costs, the reimbursement system is shifting away from quantity and the number of patient visits. Instead, insurance

companies want to pay groups and organizations of providers based on how they improve quality of care while reducing costs.

But making the shift and meeting all the requirements of ACA provisions has proven to be complicated and costly for small, independent practices.

"Legal and compliance costs of staying independent are exorbitant," said Dr. J. Matthew Knight of Knight Dermatology Institute in Orlando and a member of the network. "The IP Network gives doctors hope that they can do this."

Although President-elect Donald Trump said he intends to repeal or replace Obamacare, experts say that the movement toward a value-based system is here to stay, because of projections that show increasing health-care costs in the next decade.

"So this initiative won't go away," said Larry Jones, executive director of the IP Network and a health policy expert. "And both Democrats and Republicans will understand that."

The IP Network is an independent practice association, a type of practice organization that predates ACA and helps smaller practices with negotiating contracts and getting better reimbursement rates from insurance companies. Providers pay a nominal annual membership fee to be part of the network, which is one of the largest IPAs in the region.

But White and his team have taken the concept further by creating a network that provides a full range of services to patients, from primary care to outpatient surgery and imaging, diagnostics and home health.

The organization includes a statewide pediatric independent physicians' network called Clinical Alliance Network, and it's establishing its own urgent-care centers called ER Clinix, the first of which opened recently in Sand Lake, and with eight more in the works. Also, coming soon, is a call center, which helps connect patients with a provider.

Consumers can find a list of providers at [www.ipnetworkflorida.com](http://www.ipnetworkflorida.com).

The group has already secured an agreement with **Cigna** in a population-based model of care, called Cigna Collaborative Care, becoming one of Cigna's 150 such arrangements with large physician groups across the nation. As part of the model, the insurance company may reward the providers if they reach the goal of improving quality and lowering medical costs.

"It's an integrated health network," White said. "We basically share services. And we can offer a broad range of services on outpatient basis at a much lower cost."

Among the benefits of an integrated network is a shared health database, which can prevent duplication of service. [Orlando Health](#) and [Florida Hospital](#) also have integrated networks, also called Clinically Integrated Networks or CINs. But independent, non-hospital-based providers also say that absent facility fees, their prices and patient co-pays are lower.

"If you get an MRI in a free-standing imaging center, the bill is about \$1,600, but if you get that same test in a hospital, the charge is \$7,000," said Jones. "So if you're in a health plan that covers 80 percent of your bill and you have to pay the other 20 percent, you're going to pay different amounts depending on which system you use."

IP Network and UCF College of Medicine recently struck a partnership to share resources such as Health IT, best practices and research. The two may also create clinics in high-need areas in the future.

The network has written a letter of support for UCF's plans to build a teaching hospital in Lake Nona and hopes to help staff the new hospital, integrate its doctors into UCF Health system and help keep young graduating doctors in the community.

"What [the partnership] shows to me is the commitment that UCF has to all the doctors who practice in Central Florida, and it also shows that local physicians have trust in us to partner with us," said medical school founding dean Dr. Deborah German.

The group maintains that its main driver is not so much competing with hospitals but helping physicians stay independent in an era of uncertainty.

"This is something that our community should embrace," said Knight. "There's room for both independent doctors and employed doctors and this can create a model for the rest of the U.S."

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