

PERSONAL HEALTH
**WORTH
SELECTS**

Getting Physical, By: Ian Keown

“Here, you can spend 50 to 100 minutes one-on-one with your doctor,” say Millard Gamble, owner and president of Sun Risk Management, in St. Petersburg, Florida. “Where else can you do that?” Gamble isn’t referring to one of those renowned clinics favored by executives but to a full-scale medical center functioning within the Canyon Ranch Health Resort. There are, of course, many outstanding executive-style clinics and wellness centers across the country, but few offer patients the opportunity to step from their stress tests and bone densitometry scan directly onto fairways and tennis courts. A growing band of corporate leaders are now enjoying checkups at such resort clinics, where they can even fit in a luxury spa vacation, taking a few hours each day for tests and consultations.

There are currently four major players: the Greenbrier Clinic at the Greenbrier, in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia (304-536-4870); Canyon Ranch Health Resort in Tucson, Arizona, and its sister resort in Lenox, Massachusetts (800-742-9000); and the WellMax Center for Preventive Medicine at La Quinta Resort in La Quinta, California (760-777-8772).

Although their brochures tend to toss around such terms as *wellness* and *integrative health care*, these clinics are not, as some critics put it, flaky. Their menus include health procedures such as pulmonary function tests and Doppler vascular imaging services right on their premises. All emphasize preventive medicine. Critics of resort clinics (and some critics of hi-tech diagnosis in general) dismiss many of these procedures as a waste of time, saying they turn up more questions than answers. To find out if the resort clinics live up to their promises, *Worth* sent me to La Quinta to sample the WellMax Silver package: eight hours over a two-night, three-day stay.

Tucked into a corner of the main plaza of the resort, the WellMax Center’s offices have the hushed air of an executive suite— the first thing you notice is the welcome absence of crowds (I was the only patient in the waiting room).

Consultations at WellMax begin with a 50- to 90-minute one-on-one “extensive medical interview” with a WellMax physician. Mine was to be held with the center’s founder and director, Daniel Cosgrove, M.D. As he was off lecturing in Los Angeles, however, I went directly into tests: a comprehensive physical examination, a nutrition evaluation, and an hour long musculoskeletal assessment that involved “over 30 specific measures” of my structural body.

Three hours later, I was paroled for the day, but instead of stepping out into the hubbub of traffic as I would have in an urban clinic, I strolled through a peaceful oasis of plazas and fountains, past swimming pools and hot tubs, to the fairways of La Quinta’s famed golf courses.

Early the next morning, I reported for more rigorous testing. After filling five vials with blood (“20 chemistry measures, which include measures of liver and kidney

function and total cholesterol”), I had my session with Cosgrove and his eight-page questionnaire, followed by more tests, such as a 45-minute WellScan to assess 12 “biomarkers of aging.”

After a one-hour lunch break, I returned for the final battery of tests. Cosgrove suggested that it might be wise for me to pursue additional tests. Normally, this would be a nuisance- telephone calls to outside specialists, juggling schedules several days down the road; in this case, I was simply led to another room and another specialist.

Throughout my evaluation at WellMax, I was reminded of how personalized service is supposed to be: I was never left in a holding pen while the doctors attended to a production line of patients. I was, in effect, king of the ward.

The big advantage of resort clinics is the pace. Not only do doctors and staff have more time, but patients seem more willing to listen and to ask questions than they would of they had to rush back to the office. While the WellMax operation is smaller than those at Canyon Ranch and the Greenbrier Clinic, the procedures all parallel one another.

On my second morning at WellMax, I met with the doctor and his pile of evaluations. Cosgrove is an amiable fellow, but he pulls no punches- he tells you exactly where you stand, what you ought to do about it, and (with my concurrence) called my doctor back in New York City to schedule follow-up tests that he considered of more than routine importance. My visit to WellMax finished, I left with my bulky report, 55 pages of airport reading that elicited mixed feelings of concern and elation (how can you not be elated when you find out your biological age is 15 years younger than your actual age?). Granted, the report repeats admonitions I’ve heard hundreds of times (careful diet, more exercise, more sleep), but at least Team WellMax spells out exactly what should be done. Resolved to follow the clinic’s detailed advice on “lifestyle reforms”, I skipped the airline’s coffee and settled for bottled water.

I’ve discovered that my positive view of WellMax is shared by others. Many health resorts are finding that their clinic facilities are becoming an important source of revenue. Often executives visit because their companies send them. The Greenbrier Clinic has incentive programs tailored specifically to corporations. Mark Wels, president of MK Battery in Anaheim, California, took a team of six to La Quinta for a management retreat, with the WellMax clinic as an integral part of the trip. “At least two thirds of the group have really altered their lifestyles,” he says. “It was an investment in the future of the company.”

And it is an investment. Consultation fees are stiff- not surprising given the amount of time and personal attention offered. Basic evaluations at La Quinta’s WellMax start at \$1,975; comprehensive checkups can go as high as \$10,000. Evaluations at Greenbrier Clinic start at \$1,250 and can go up to \$4,000. Accommodations are extra. Packages at the Canyon Ranch resorts are all-inclusive (health services, accommodations, and spa privileges). Four-day packages start at \$2,200 in the low season and \$3,300 in the high season. The WellMax Silver package costs \$1,975, though my final tab was higher due to additional lab work (which can easily add \$500 and up) and ultrasound scans. Health insurance and Medicare may kick in for some procedures, but those plans rarely cover preventive medicine. Is it worth the money? Ask Millard Gamble. Before his visit to Canyon Ranch, Gamble faced possible surgery for serious heart problems. Armed with awareness and a new lifestyle regimen, he is now on the road to better health.