

# The Hotseat

OUR RESEARCH, THOUGHTS, & MUSINGS

## Patient Access Problems Get Under Her Skin—Everseat Sits Down with Boston Dermatologist Dr. Emmy Graber

POSTED BY ANDY TARZY ON MAY 25, 2016



Memorial Day weekend is here and that means more sun and more time exposing your skin to its pleasing but also potentially harmful rays. In fact, May is **Melanoma**

**Awareness Month** and a good time to reflect on the challenge of getting an appointment with a dermatologist – not an easy task.

A survey of 7,499 patients who saw U.S. dermatologists from 2011-2012 found that **31% of patients reported a problem with scheduling their appointment.** Of those who had an appointment problem, **47% said it took too long to get an appointment.**

Cities across the United States consistently show long wait times for getting dermatology appointments. According to the Commonwealth Fund, the average wait time for a dermatology appointment in Philadelphia is 47 days; in Minneapolis the average wait time is 56 days; and in Boston, it is 72 days.

Everseat asked highly regarded Boston Dermatologist Dr. Emmy Graber for her perspective on the challenge of patient access in dermatology. The following are our questions and her answers, edited only for clarity.

### **Are you familiar with the phenomenon in dermatology of long waits for new patient appointments?**

Oh yes! Absolutely. I frequently get complaints from patients that they have had to wait weeks and often months to see a dermatologist. Not only do I hear this from patients but also from primary care physicians who want to refer patients to a dermatologist. A primary care physician might see a rash or a lesion that he or she thinks needs attention from a dermatologist but can't find a dermatologist that has any openings for months. It is frustrating both for patients and for primary care physicians.

### **What do you think is contributing to this trend?**

There is an increasing demand for dermatologists. As the public becomes more educated about skin cancer, patients are looking to dermatologists for skin examinations to catch and treat any suspicious lesions. Years ago not as many people went to the dermatologist for preventative services like skin checks. Today many people have a dermatologist that they see regularly for skin cancer screenings. It is great that more people are aware of the need for preventative screenings but it also increases demand for dermatologists and thereby increases the wait for an appointment. The resulting delay can be especially problematic for those that have an acute problem such as a rash or painful growth that needs to be treated immediately.

### **What kinds of innovations are you seeing in the field to expand access to the care of dermatologists?**

I see two main types of innovations geared towards those seeking the attention of dermatologists. First, there are scheduling innovations. These may be in the form of apps such as Everseat, that can help people find an available appointment. By

using the app, a patient can easily see what office in their area has an opening without having to call each individual office. Second, teledermatology is an innovation that enables patients to get dermatologic care without visiting a dermatologist. Patients send photos of their skin to a dermatologist who can then review the images and remotely instruct the patient on the best course of action.

### **How are you choosing to differentiate your practice from others that patients can choose from, and how will you make sure they can get in to see you?**

I strive to create a convenient, enjoyable experience for all of our patients and I want this positive experience to start even before a patient steps in the door. To that end, we aim to be as accessible as possible. I have tailored our office hours to accommodate early risers who want to come in before work or school and also have evening hours and lunchtime appointments. Patients can find us through the Everseat app to get an appointment at a moment's notice.

For our existing patients, we have a patient portal so that they can communicate with us via email without having to call into the office with questions or concerns. In the next few months we are rolling out a telemedicine initiative so that we can advise patients who can't physically get to our office. Many people do not think that going to a doctor's office is a pleasant experience and I am trying to change that. The whole experience starts with booking an appointment and I want to make it a seamless, easy process.

**Dr. Emmy Graber** is the founder and President of the **Dermatology Institute of Boston**. She is a former Assistant Professor of Dermatology at Boston University School of Medicine where she was Director of the BU Cosmetic and Laser at Boston Medical Center. Visit [www.DermBoston.com](http://www.DermBoston.com) for additional information.

To book an appointment with a dermatologist, or another type of provider, check out available appointments on [app.everseat.com](http://app.everseat.com).



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