DALLAS -
Jack Harris needed something to ease his shoulder and arm pain. A fusion would limit his mobility, but an artificial disc replacement seemed like a good solution. The catch, his insurance wouldn't pay for the $29,000 procedure, so Harris used his own retirement savings.

"The money I worked so hard for, worked so hard to save for my health, and you know some people, they can't make that decision, and at least I could, and I chose health, and I chose to have the surgery done," Harris said.

Harris' doctor allowed him to pay directly for the medical service he needed. It's an approach known as "boutique medicine." In some cases, it cuts the insurance company out of the medical equation.

"Well, to the extent that they try to interfere with the patient/physician relationship and the practice of medicine, yes," said Dr. Scott Blumenthal, MD, orthopedic surgeon at Texas Back Institute in Dallas.

Proponents of "boutique medicine" say it gives patients more choices in their care and allows for more time with doctors. The downside is that some worry too many physicians will turn to this type of practice, which will add to the doctor shortage, and it can be expensive, depending on the service.

"For lack of a better term, it has a certain snob appeal, that I can go to the doctor I want, not to the doctor the insurance company tells me I have to go to," Blumenthal explained.

"Health Beat: MRI for better prostate biopsy" - Every year, one million men undergo prostate biopsies to determine if they have cancer. Doctors often order the biopsy if a man has an elevated level of a protein, called prostate specific antigen, or PSA, that could indicate cancer. Doctors are now using MRI for a more accurate test, and the chance to catch cancer earlier than ever before.

"Health Beat: Using robots to remove the esophagus" - Last year in the United States, doctors diagnosed 16,000 new cases of cancer of the esophagus, the muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. While no one is sure exactly what causes it, age, gender, and a history of acid reflux are risk factors. Now, surgeons are using a new technique to remove the esophagus and help patients recover faster than ever before.

"Health Beat: Easier fix for bad backs" - Every year, one million men undergo prostate biopsies to determine if they have cancer. Doctors often order the biopsy if a man has an elevated level of a protein, called prostate specific antigen, or PSA, that could indicate cancer. Doctors are now using MRI for a more accurate test, and the chance to catch cancer earlier than ever before.

"Health Beat: Anthrax: Fighting cancer?" - Last year in the United States, doctors diagnosed 16,000 new cases of cancer of the esophagus, the muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. While no one is sure exactly what causes it, age, gender, and a history of acid reflux are risk factors. Now, surgeons are using a new technique to remove the esophagus and help patients recover faster than ever before.

"Health Beat: The key to reversing aging: Young blood" - Last year in the United States, doctors diagnosed 16,000 new cases of cancer of the esophagus, the muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. While no one is sure exactly what causes it, age, gender, and a history of acid reflux are risk factors. Now, surgeons are using a new technique to remove the esophagus and help patients recover faster than ever before.

"Health Beat: Sleep stealers in children" - Last year in the United States, doctors diagnosed 16,000 new cases of cancer of the esophagus, the muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. While no one is sure exactly what causes it, age, gender, and a history of acid reflux are risk factors. Now, surgeons are using a new technique to remove the esophagus and help patients recover faster than ever before.

"Health Beat: Interactive art rehab" - Last year in the United States, doctors diagnosed 16,000 new cases of cancer of the esophagus, the muscular tube that connects the throat to the stomach. While no one is sure exactly what causes it, age, gender, and a history of acid reflux are risk factors. Now, surgeons are using a new technique to remove the esophagus and help patients recover faster than ever before.
"You're looked after like you're the most special person on the planet," Harris said.

For Harris, it was well worth the cost.

"Just being able to engage in life and to not be consumed with pain," Harris said.

A leader of the American Academy of Private Physicians estimates as many as 5,000 doctors nationwide have direct primary care practices, charging fees of $600 to several thousand dollars.

And by the way, Harris said he appealed his insurance company’s decision and it did reimburse him a significant portion of the expenses for his artificial disc replacement surgery.

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Health Beat: Boutique medicine: Pay-as-you-go healthcare?