MIT Medical staff answers questions about everything from filling prescriptions to dealing with serious illness or injury

Wednesday, July 14 at noon (EDT)

Participants:
- Alycen Ashburn, assistant director of the MIT Parents Association.
- Kim Schive, communications coordinator for MIT Medical, chat moderator
- William Kettyle, M.D., medical director
- David Diamond, M.D., associate medical director
- Kris Ruzycki, A.N.P.-B.C., director of student health services
- Kim Carroll, B.S.N., R.N., care manager
- Lucy Walsh, manager of the MIT Health Plans
- Maryanne Kirkbride, M.S., M.B.A., R.N., clinical director for campus life
- Alan Siegel, Ed.D., chief of the Mental Health Service

Ashburn: We're here today to address mental and medical health questions with the representatives from MIT Medical, but if you have any questions for other departments, send them to mykidis@mit.edu. The Parents Association will help you track down the answers for your general, non-health related questions.

Schive: Today's chat will focus on medical and mental health services at MIT. A second chat on Monday, July 19 will deal with questions about insurance coverage for students. We received some questions for today's chat in advance, and we'll be answering those along with any questions you submit during the chat itself.

Schive [pre-submitted question]: What is the best way for a student to get a prescription filled?

Walsh: We have a pharmacy on site on the first floor of MIT Medical. Students enrolled in the Student Extended Insurance Plan are encouraged to fill their prescriptions at the MIT Pharmacy. If the MIT Pharmacy does not stock the medication, it will arrange to get it from another local pharmacy. The MIT Pharmacy can fill prescriptions for any student (if the prescription is written by an MIT Medical clinician) but the MIT Pharmacy may not participate with your personal insurance program. In that case, there are retail pharmacies in Central Square, not far from campus.

maryschafer (Q): Do you have a microbiology lab to perform cultures?

Carroll: Yes, we do.

maryschafer (Q): Will my child have access to well visits?

Kettyle: Yes indeed -- you do not have to be sick or injured to come here for a visit! We're happy to have well visits -- they help establish relationships they can enhance care, answer questions and give advice on healthy choices.

lunalyon (Q): I'm wondering how my son can get allergy shots while at school.

Ruzycki: Hello Lunalyon -- good question. Yes, your child will be able to get their allergy injections here at MIT Medical. They will first have to have an appointment with our allergist here at MIT Medical. If your child is a new entering student, they can learn exactly what they have to do by reading the instruction page of the Medical Report Form.

Schive [pre-submitted question]: I would like to know if MIT offers assistance and consulting to students who have addiction issues with playing computer games. I have had a couple of other parents mention this
issue to me and it would be great to know the contact person, phone, counseling office hours, website to get help. Is the helpline available during the summer while students are working there (UROP, etc.)?

Siegel: MIT Mental Health provides counseling and treatment for a wide variety of problems that students face as they engage the MIT community -- homesickness, relationship problems, making friends, depressions, new challenges as they discover aspects of daily life and studies that they are not familiar with. There is no charge for any of our services. We can help with problems with addictions, including spending more time than is useful or helpful with computer games. If there is a clinician or program in the local area that has needs that are best served by a specialist, we can connect the student and clinician/program. The Mental Health Service has a clinician on call 24/7 for urgent concerns from students and families. We see students by appointment (usually no waiting) or through our walk-in hours (Monday through Friday, 2-4 p.m.). Students would just call 617-253-2916.

maryschafer (Q): Are caregivers available 24/7?

Diamond: Care givers are available 24/7. We have on-site doctors and nurses as well as clinicians available by phone. Our Urgent Care service sees patients on nights and weekends throughout the year.

maryschafer (Q): Is there a charge for ancillary services provided at MIT Medical?

Walsh: Most services at MIT Medical are covered in full by the Student Medical Plan, the cost of which is included in the tuition. Some services, such as certain vaccines, do have a copay. But there is no copay on lab or X-ray services.

maryschafer (Q): How are the students assigned a primary care giver?

Kirkbride: Incoming students can choose a primary care giver by reviewing clinician profiles on our web page.

maryschafer (Q): If a child is ill, can they walk in or do they call for appointments?

Carroll: Your child can walk in now at anytime and be seen as we have an Urgent Care department. They can also call and schedule an appointment with a provider as well for the same day, as visits are blocked for such cases as this.

maryschafer (Q): Is there access to dentists?

Kirkbride: Yes, we have a dental service on the fifth floor of our building.

maryschafer (Q): What level of care can you provide before sending a student to a hospital setting?

Diamond: We have an Urgent Care service where many problems can be treated without the need to transfer to an emergency room. We also have on-site specialists in many areas for diagnosis and treatment of non-urgent problems. However, true life-threatening emergencies will be triaged to one of our nearby referral hospitals, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston or Mount Auburn Hospital, Cambridge. Ambulance services are available within minutes with advanced care capacities to transport ill students as needed.

Karen (Q): Can a student transfer their current prescription, or will they need to get a new one from the MIT facility?

Ruzycki: Hi Karen -- if they will be using our MIT Medical pharmacy, then they will need a prescription from one of our clinicians. They just need to make an appointment with a clinician (physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant) and bring along the medication that they need. I would recommend that the student come to school with a 2-3 month supply of any medications that they are on, if possible.
**Carri (Q):** Can my child establish an ongoing relationship with a primary care physician at MIT Medical?

**Kirkbride:** Yes, all students can have a primary care physician at MIT Medical. We encourage that, especially if the student has ongoing medical issues -- but we welcome everyone!

**twill (Q):** If a student needs to be hospitalized, say at Mass. General, is there any involvement by people at MIT Medical? Does the involvement depend on whether the student has MIT Extended Insurance? And how would it be different if the student has MIT Extended as secondary insurance?

**Kettyle:** All our internists are on the staff of Mass. General Hospital and we follow all our patients at the MGH, no matter what the insurance coverage or which service they are admitted to. We help coordinate care, deal with Institute-related issues (exams, deadlines, etc.) and will help coordinate continuing care. The insurance coverage is to pay the bills; the care coordination is part of being a member of the MIT community.

**HFord (Q):** My daughter is already at MIT for the Interphase program. Are the medical facilities open/available to students over the summer? If not, where would she go if she needed medical help?

**Carroll:** Yes, we are open over the summer and can assist her.

**maryschafer (Q):** How can I verify that our medical forms were received?

**Ruzycki:** You could call our health screening department to ask them if they have been received.

**maryschafer (Q):** If a student is too ill to walk to the facility, would security be available to transport them or another service?

**Kirkbride:** We have several ways to assist students with transportation including MIT police, taxi vouchers (home from a hospital, for example), and an all-volunteer state-licensed student-run ambulance service.

**Schive [pre-submitted question]:** It appears that the student has to wait for two to four hours at MIT clinic before being seen and even then the outcome may not be satisfactory. My daughter had to wait for two hours to be seen for a bad toenail injury a day before her final exams and the dressing applied was said to be worse than what she herself had done. On another occasion she had to wait nearly three hours before some one saw her for two minutes and told her to make an appointment with a physician.

**Kettyle:** Time is among the most precious commodities at MIT, and we make every effort to respect the time constraints that we know of part of life at MIT. Unfortunately, the supply of caregivers and demand for care cannot always be matched as well as we would like. Calling ahead for a scheduled visit -- usually the same day -- can be a way of minimizing wait times. Having a primary care clinician can also be a way of making sure that care is obtained in a timely, efficient manner. Our staff of triage nurses are on site and available to help students secure care with the right clinician in a timely, efficient fashion.

**twill (Q):** Can students switch primary care doctors if they don't like the first one they choose?

**Kirkbride:** Yes, it is very simple to do. Our new students are often novice users of health care on their own. We know this is a learning process for them and expect there to be changes like this.

**Schive [pre-submitted question]:** Is a normal, annual physical examination something MIT Medical expects to do? My student is spending the vast majority of her time there nowadays.

**Diamond:** The recommended frequency and content of routine exams changes as people grow beyond childhood. In addition, routine preventative care can occur during visits for episodic illness or injury. Anyone with a chronic medical condition, such as diabetes or asthma, or with other risk factors such as family history or lifestyle behaviors may need visits more than annually. Other healthy young adults may not need
a routine exam each year, though we are happy to see students to review their care needs on a regular basis.

**lee (Q):** How about vision care?

**Ruzycki:** Routine vision care for eye examinations is not covered under the basic Student Medical Plan, but it is under the Student Extended Insurance Plan. But if the student has an eye injury or illness, then they can see one of our doctors in the eye service.

**Carri (Q):** What is the charge/co-pay for dental services?

**Walsh:** Charges vary by procedure, and a price list is available in the Dental service. Dental coverage is not included under the MIT student insurance, but the MIT Dental Service does accept Delta Dental insurance, subject to deductibles and copayment of your individual policy. For other dental insurance plans, we provide a standard claim form you can submit for reimbursement. They also accept MasterCard, Visa, Discover, and personal checks at the time of service. Also, students can charge dental services to their student account.

**Schive [pre-submitted question]:** Can a 17-year-old obtain birth control pills at campus health center?

**Ruzycki:** Yes a 17-year-old can get birth control pills here at MIT Medical. Of course it would involve an appointment with a clinician to see if there were any medical contraindications first.

**lynne (Q):** Do MIT Medical doctors participate in any other insurance plans or just MIT's?

**Walsh:** The clinicians at MIT Medical generally do not participate with outside insurance plans. However, most services at MIT Medical are covered as part of the basic Student Medical Plan. Every student is covered under the Student Medical Plan through their tuition. Services not covered under the Student Medical Plan but covered under the Student Extended Insurance Plan include such services as routine eye exams, obstetrical care and prescription drugs.

**Schive [pre-submitted question]:** I want to have my son be able to sign something that allows his parents the right to be informed about his medical information. I find it difficult to pay for things I have no info on.

**Kirkbride:** By law, student medical information is private. That said, many students want their parents involved in their care and we make that process as simple as possible. Your student will let their clinician know that they want you to be involved, the clinician will note it in the record and will be happy to communicate with you for that illness or injury.

**Lisa (Q):** Could you talk about the relationship that MIT Medical has with Boston area hospitals?

**Kettyle:** Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Mount Auburn Hospital (MAH) are Harvard teaching hospitals that are close by and with which we have long, strong, and active relationships. Many of our staff and our affiliated specialists are on the staffs of these hospitals, and our care coordinators are well connected to the care teams and services of these institutions. MGH is a large, super-specialized facility. Mount Auburn is a sophisticated community/teaching hospital. Care needs, wait times and other factors help determine which facility we use when hospitalization is needed. We also work comfortably with the other large Harvard teaching hospitals -- the Beth Israel Deaconess and the Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

**lunalyon (Q):** What is the Medical Report Form?

**Ruzycki:** The medical report form is the medical information (medical history, immunizations, physical exam) that new entering students must submit before they register for classes. It can be downloaded from the MIT Medical website if one was not sent to your child.
vlee (Q): Is dental coverage included in the extended insurance health plan?

Walsh: Dental services are not covered under the Student Extended Insurance Plan. The only exception to that is a consultation regarding possible impacted wisdom teeth, and subsequent extraction if the teeth are impacted in bone. There are a few other dental/medical procedures that are covered. Additional details are available in the Student Health Plan Overview on our website.

HFord (Q): What kind of outreach to the students does MIT Medical mental health services have in place to make sure that most kids are being reached with regards to services available and how to go about obtaining services? What about seminars to promote healthy life choices, general health education, or CPR/first aid classes?

Siegel: About mental health outreach: all of our clinical staff are connected to residence halls, fraternities, sororities and living groups, so residence life staff concerned about a student know how to connect us with the student. During the year, we are in the residences at study breaks and offer talks on practical things (sleep, for example) and make ourselves known to students. And we are actively engaged with faculty and departments, so that if they can easily consult us with any questions or concerns. We do depression screenings during the year and are at a number of all campus events so that students can get to know us.

Kirkbride: We have multiple venues and programs to help our students make healthy choices and understand what services are available to them. Community Wellness at MIT Medical conducts in-dorm workshops and orientation programs on issues such as healthy eating, managing stress, sleep, relaxation, healthy relationships. We provide training to our residence life staff on these issues so they can support students in real time. We have CPR/first aid classes available and a student peer advisor group called MedLinks that assist students when needed. We are available to see students individually, we work with groups of students (dorm floors etc) to design special programs and we support Wellness Week in the spring. Lastly, there is a PE course called “Upgrade Your Health and Happiness” that covers many of the above topics and gives students hands on experience.

Kettyle: We are trying to make outreach one of our major, ongoing and most important activities. We try to find target audience appropriate, timely, informative ways of reaching our student populations. We have a number of programs, tactics and strategies that we use. "Doc in the dorm" describes an outreach effort from our Mental Health Services -- a mental health clinician is assigned as liaison to each living facility, opening up a connection that can foster helping encounters. MedLinks is a peer group cohort of students representing almost all living groups who are trained by the Medical Department -- not to provide care, but to facilitate connections to appropriate care at the Medical Department. Coordinated programs with Athletics (DAPER) are other outreach activities we foster. Our Community Wellness programs provide active education, and information geared to the needs of our students. We’re also open to ideas about improving our outreach efforts.

Carri (Q): What about gynecological care -- is that basic or extended? In other words, can a female student have an annual exam including Pap smear?

Walsh: Absolutely. Routine annual gynecological exams and Pap tests are covered under the basic Medical Plan. Pregnancy-related services are excluded from the basic plan and covered under the Extended Insurance Plan.

Carri (Q): Are gynecological services available for young women?

Kettyle: Hello Carri -- yes, gynecology services are available on site. We have two full time OB/GYN physicians, and several nurse-midwives and nurse clinicians who provide comprehensive gynecological care for students and other women in our community.

swaldo (Q): Is there a process for identifying a student who might need mental health care and encouraging them to seek it? I would guess a lot of people are reluctant to admit having such problems.
Siegel: We have had pretty good luck helping students, faculty, and staff know that having worries or difficulties are not automatically mental health problems, but are life problems. We approach these as problems that they handle every day in problem sets and other such academic challenges -- so we help students connect how they deal with academic challenges with how they can deal with personal challenges.

twill (Q): Would mental health services be the place to go for a problem like freezing when the workload gets heavy? Or would that be better addressed by someone else?

Siegel: Hi twill -- yes, the Mental Health Service offers workshops during the year on things like test anxiety, procrastination, and managing time. We are networked throughout the Institute, so when a student is known by an advisor, GRT, dean, or faculty member to be swamped, they will help the student connect with us or whichever campus resource is best.

jenC (Q): Is there an H1N1 forecast for this year? How are situations like H1N1 and meningitis outbreaks handled?

Diamond: No one is sure what level of activity we will see during this next influenza season, which typically begins in late fall in Cambridge. Given our experience last year, we are gearing up to offer vaccine to anyone in our community who wants it. We hope the vaccine supply will be early and adequate enough this year. We are well equipped to respond to any other outbreaks of infectious disease, be that gastroenteritis, chicken pox, or meningitis.

Carri (Q): What are the major concerns that mental health professionals have in terms of student's health while at MIT?

Siegel: We pay close attention to how students balance their lives so they are not attending only to their academics. We help them with finding ways to arrange their days so that we can be sure they are sleeping enough and at the best times. Sleep deprivation makes everything a student is dealing with more difficult. And we realize that many of our students have not had much experience with dating and other such relationships, so we help with thinking about how relationships work and can be healthy.

Irma_Villalva (Q): What are the begin and end dates of coverage (extended) for each semester? Is there ever a period of no coverage?

Walsh: Our student insurance follows the standard academic year; coverage for the fall term begins September 1 and continues through January 31. Spring coverage begins February 1 and continues to August 31. Incoming freshman, however, are covered early, beginning August 1, to be sure they have coverage when they arrive on campus.

HFord (Q): Is alternative health care available -- chiropractic care, acupuncture/pressure, herbalists?

Walsh: We do not provide these services at MIT Medical, but there are providers in the local community.

twill (Q): If a mental health problem such as depression is identified in a student, what kind of treatment options are available? Ongoing talk therapy? Medication?

Siegel: We offer a wide array of treatment options for students who are identified as being depressed -- individual and group counseling/psychotherapy, focused/specialized cognitive/behavioral therapies, learning skills to manage stress, mindfulness, and medications. We have a well-staffed service since we also see faculty, staff, and their dependents, so there is no wait for any service, including a medication consultation. We have a large community of mental health clinicians close by, so when a student could best use a kind of treatment we do not provide, we can make a referral and follow-up to make sure the student has engaged with the community clinician. If a student has the MIT Extended Student Insurance, this outside referral process is very easy, since it covers care provided by almost any clinician in the area.
When a student has his or her parents' insurance outside referrals can be a bit more challenging, but we have had a good record of matching student and clinician.

**swaldo (Q):** Any programs in place at MIT to encourage students to make healthy food choices, and also to get some exercise?

**Kirkbride:** Most incoming freshman will take a Physical Education class each of their first four semesters. In addition, we have a very robust set of club and intramural sports teams. Many residences have workout space with gym equipment. With regards to healthy eating, our signature program is the 21-Day Breakfast Challenge, which students love. All our materials and programs are finely tuned to reflect the real lives of our students who lack time and tend to put eating lower down on their priority list.

**Karen (Q):** Are prescriptions covered under the basic medical plan, or is there a copay?

**Walsh:** Prescription drugs are not covered under the basic medical plan. Pharmacy coverage is included under the Student Extended Insurance Plan, subject to a $3,500 annual benefit maximum.

**Ashburn:** This is just a reminder that we'll cover more insurance questions next Monday at noon EDT at our next chat.

**twill (Q):** Kids often don't know when they need mental health services. How does the school get them there?

**Siegel:** I think I have answered a question like this earlier, but if I haven't, please let me know.

**swaldo (Q):** At welcome week, there were some discussions of parent notification of medical treatments. Can you review the policies on that again?

**Kirkbride:** Our policy is simple: your student can let the clinician know that they want you involved in the care of their illness or injury. The clinician will note that in the record.

**Siegel:** I wanted to make sure that you all know that we welcome calls from parents who are concerned about their students, or who are not sure how to handle an interaction with a student. So all you'd need to do is to call 617-253-2916 and speak with the clinician on call. If you have a sense that your student is likely to have trouble with their engagement with the community or their studies, we are glad to know about that, too.

**Carri (Q):** Just a comment -- my daughter was very ill and had to go back to MIT Medical three times before she was given a mono test (positive). Eighteen-year-olds aren't used to advocating for themselves with doctors. I wish you would help the students gain a better understanding of how to ask for what they need and not feel as if they are being rude.

**Kettyle:** Hello Carri -- I am sorry that it took three visits to get a diagnosis! We do try to make sure that we are addressing the care needs of our students. The balance between treating students as adults (which is what they want/seek) and making sure that they are getting care, following instructions (i.e., parenting) is a difficult one. We are developing an enhanced care coordination/management program and will begin to actively follow up on visits to our facility, hopefully increasing care quality and avoiding repeat visits.

**Kirkbride:** Please keep an eye out for the MIT Medical open house during Parent's Orientation. We look forward to meeting you!

**Ashburn:** Everyone, it seems as though our hour is up! I'd like to thank MIT Medical for participating in these chats. I know I've learned a lot today.

**Ashburn:** If parents have questions that come up later, to what email address should they send these?
Schive: They can go to our website at http://web.medweb.mit.edu and use the form under the "contact us" link.