



PATIENT ADVOCACY: Navigating the dizzying medical-care map can be both time-consuming and confusing. Add in long waits and runarounds, and you've got a lot of discouraged people aching for a solution. Though not a cure, patient advocacy services aim to facilitate the relationship between individuals and their health care--from locating the best doctors and specialists to researching treatment options and handling insurance claims.

Dr. Abbie Leibowitz launched one of the first patient advocacy businesses in 2001 with four other former Aetna U.S. Healthcare employees. Initially, they planned to offer their services as high-end perks for executives, but the business leaders they spoke to shared the same sentiment: All employees would benefit from such a service. "[It reinforced] the idea that this was a product for the masses," says Leibowitz, 58. Now expecting \$8 million in 2005 sales, Health Advocate in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, counts both Fortune 1000 companies and small businesses as clients.

Of course, some entrepreneurs cater exclusively to affluent individuals and their families. But as Jack London, director of health-care consulting firm Apex Management Group's patient advocacy program, points out, opportunity is everywhere: "[Health] crises don't financially discriminate."

To get started, you'll need a thorough understanding of the health-care system--and a sense of compassion. "This field of medicine requires more than just a system," says London. "It needs a human touch." —*A.Y.P.*