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Dear beloved patients,

Many of you have read the news or heard from me about how hard it is to practice primary care medicine in Massachusetts in 2023. Since the Pandemic, all of our costs are inflated (staffing, supplies, insurance, vaccines are 30-50% higher) and we cannot set our rates: Doctors get what the insurance companies pay us with very little say. Atkinson Family Practice has been providing care to our patients since 2005. In that time, I believe we have made a name for ourselves offering high-quality medical care and accepting everyone possible. This means, unlike most private practices, we see MassHealth patients even though it is at a financial loss for the practice, due to the state's insurance payment rates. We deeply value all our patients, so I mention this not to complain, but to pull back the curtain on some of the considerations of a family practice. Insurance companies and governmental agencies place increasing administrative burdens on medical practices. We work to give everyone excellent care, but in our insurance-driven world, our time as medical providers and staff is increasingly pulled in too many directions.

Patient care time is only a portion of what we do. Primary Care providers average an hour of paperwork for every hour that we are in exam rooms. I see 115 patients a week and am on the computer or phone on nights and weekends to complete all the many tasks of being a physician and running a practice. This is all a recipe for burnout. It is also hard to recruit doctors as we can't compete with big corporate pay structures.

In the past year, I met Dr. Shayne Taylor who has decided to move with her family from Tennessee to Western Mass, attracted by our more inclusive social climate. We are excited to welcome Dr. Taylor to AFP. She is also passionate about giving great care to patients, but she has little kids and does not want to become burnt-out, so she raised the idea of a Concierge model of care as a possible solution. We researched and developed what this model would look like at AFP over the past year. An annual concierge fee will allow her to see fewer patients and provide more customized care. Patients who have been frustrated by wait times and brief appointments may prefer this model, and the added revenue could shore up AFP and support our efforts to see everyone – including maintaining care for our lower-income patients. But let me be clear, the Concierge program is **OPTIONAL**. All existing AFP patients can stay with their Providers. They can also elect to switch to the Concierge program, should they so desire.

I have heard your concerns and critiques about AFP offering a Concierge program. As a doctor and community member lobbying our legislators to make healthcare more accessible and affordable, I am deeply invested in systemic change in the medical field, our state, and the country. I am also doing my best to successfully maintain a family practice against mighty financial odds. I am **not** trying to widen the gap of medical inequity, I **am** trying to offer more options in our community and to sustain this practice so we can continue to meet the needs of our thousands of patients.

I am active in the Massachusetts Medical society, have advocated for Medicare 4 All, Death with dignity, LGBTQ rights, Insurance reform, deductible reform, and more, all while practicing full-time medicine. I care passionately about healthcare equity and access. And as the decades have taught me, this is not a fight I can win on my own. As a dedicated doctor and community member, I will continue to advocate for increased access to healthcare, and as the head of Atkinson Family Practice, I am also committed to supporting my fellow healthcare professionals in providing the best care possible to our patients, friends, and neighbors.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

Respectfully,

Dr. Kate