While rural areas make for beautiful places to live, they come with unseen problems. Rural areas are proven to have a higher prevalence of chronic health conditions. Since these conditions often go undetected, rural areas have higher disease and mortality rates than urban areas. There are countless reasons why preventative healthcare is lacking in rural areas, but two that stand out to me are concerns with privacy and medical bills.

In rural areas, everybody knows everybody, and the words secret or confidential don’t exist. The presumed lack of anonymity is a roadblock for preventative healthcare. People don’t like being talked about, so they tend to isolate themselves from situations where information could escape. The presence of confidentiality laws is known, but they have a skewed perspective because they aren’t followed perfectly.Because of this, people who reside in rural areas have apprehensions about seeking care for medical affairs. I don’t think this is an issue that will ever be fully resolved, because you can’t control what others say, but efforts can be made to relax people’s nerves. Tightening up confidentiality laws, or even having a clinic with permanent administration, but traveling nurses and doctors, could help this issue. By having traveling nurses and doctors, they won’t get too comfortable in an area and would be less likely to disclose patient information. Most traveling healthcare professionals only stay in one area for 3-6 months, so the likelihood of seeing them multiple times in a professional setting is low, and that might make patients more comfortable.

Another issue with rural healthcare is the weariness surrounding medical bills. It’s no secret that rural regions are working class areas. Blue-collared jobs don’t always provide health insurance, leaving people either without insurance or paying obscene prices for a service they may not use that often. Even with insurance the price of seeing a doctor can be problematic. Some people rather sacrifice their health by going without care, than part with potentially hundreds or thousands of dollars. The obvious solution would be to provide pro-bono healthcare, but free service is a lot to ask of healthcare providers. A similar solution that is more of a compromise, is having a clinic that accepts whatever the insurance pays. For this to work, a minimum payment plan would need to be established so the healthcare providers are not getting the short end of an already shortened stick. This could be a logical solution because the doctors are getting paid, while the patient isn’t overextending their pocketbooks.

Preventative healthcare is vital for a long and healthy life. No matter where you live, you should have access to affordable healthcare, while still feeling safe. Although there are healthcare options in rural areas, some people might not be comfortable having their doctor as a neighbor or have the ability to pay for it. While the mentioned solutions might not solve everyone’s preventative healthcare issues, I believe they open the mind to new ideas regarding preventative healthcare in our neck of the woods.