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Finding “Doctor Right”

Your primary doctor can be one of the best assets to help you lead a healthy life. If you have a doctor you know and trust, you’ll be more likely to schedule regular check-ups and make appointments if you need care. But how do you find the right doctor for you?

This issue of *Partners2Health* offers tips on how to find the best doctor for you and your family. We’ll provide you with different ways to search for a doctor, questions to ask potential doctors, and information about the many types of doctors available to help you.

We’ll show you how you can find a doctor who will be your true partner and who will work with you to keep you and your family as healthy as can be!

Never go to a doctor whose office plants have died.

– Erma Bombeck





Having a Primary Care Doctor

To receive the best health care, you and your family should have a primary doctor who knows your medical history and can help you coordinate your overall health care. This reduces the chance for error and helps ensure you get the right care.

To choose the doctor who's right for you, think about your needs. You want a doctor who specializes in areas of health that are important to you and who makes you feel comfortable asking questions. If you are more comfortable talking about your health with someone of your own gender, keep that in mind as you search.



After you know what characteristics or specialties you want your doctor to have, follow these tips:

- Always try to find doctors in your health plan's network — these doctors have been screened for quality and competence by your health plan, and you'll save money by using them.
- Ask friends and coworkers about the doctors they like and would recommend.
- Consider the location of the doctor's office. Is it close to where you work or live?
- Research your doctor's qualifications.

Selecting the right doctor for you is an important decision. Once you have your list narrowed down to two or three doctors, interview them (or someone in their office) in person or over the phone. You can also call your state medical board for more information. To do this, call the Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States at **817-868-4000**. You can also visit their Web site at www.fsmb.org.



Questions to Ask When Choosing a Doctor

- Are you accepting new patients?
- What insurance plans do you accept?
- Where were you trained and where did you complete your residency?
- How do you stay up on the issues in medicine?
- How do you provide patient education?
- What's your approach to talking about alternative treatments and options with patients?
- What are your office hours and how do you handle off-hour calls?
- What are your policies for setting an appointment? How long does it take to get one?
- When I come in for my appointment, what is the average wait time?
- Where do you have hospital privileges?
- What are your billing policies?
- Do you communicate via e-mail? If so, can I get your e-mail address?
- Are you Board certified by an American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) Program?
- Are you particularly qualified to treat patients with my condition?

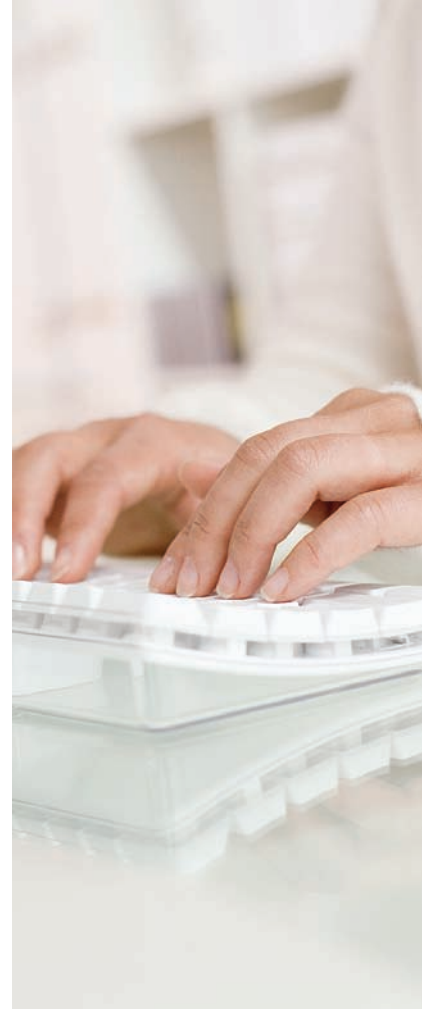
Online Resources for Finding a Doctor

Virtually all health plans today have online tools that you can use to learn more about doctors in your health plan's network. Go to your health plan's Web site or call the Member Services number on your medical ID card for more information. You can also visit the following sites to research a doctor in your area:



- www.doctor.webmd.com — allows you to search for a doctor by zip code, last name, or specialty.
- www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm — provides you with basic information on more than 814,000 licensed physicians in the United States.
- www.findadoc.com — uses a proprietary rating system to show you how doctors rate on training, skill and cost.

These are just some of the online resources available to you. With these sites and others at your fingertips, it's easier than ever to find the best doctor for you and your family.



Types of Primary Care Doctors

There are different types of primary doctors you can consider for your care. These doctors perform preventive and routine health exams and can treat common health problems. In general, the following individuals are considered to be primary doctors:



General or Family practitioners, such as medical doctors (MDs) who typically treat patients of all ages.



Doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs), who treat patients of all ages. DOs are known for using a “whole person” approach to medicine rather than treating specific symptoms or illnesses.



Internists, who treat adults. Internists specialize in internal medicine and do not practice surgery.



Pediatricians, who treat infants, children and teenagers.



Obstetricians/gynecologists (OB/GYN), who treat women and specialize in women's health care, wellness, and prenatal care. Many women use an OB/GYN as their primary care provider.

Source: MedLine Plus



Four important questions to ask your doctor as part of a routine visit:

- 1 How is my overall health?
- 2 Are you concerned about any aspect of my health?
- 3 Are there any tests I should have based on my age or for other reasons?
- 4 Do you have any recommendations about lifestyle modifications I can make to improve my health?

Get the Most out of Your Doctor Visit

One way to save time and money is to have everything that might be useful to your doctor on hand for your visit. Here's a checklist developed by Dr. Roizen and Dr. Oz, authors of "You: The Smart Patient:"

- A filled-out health profile
- Questions about your health profile
- Other documents or items (X-rays, pathology reports, or other medical records)
- Prior medical records from another physician
- Insurance information
- A list of all medications currently being taken with dosage (includes prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal supplements, etc.)
- Do you need to do anything special before the appointment, such as fast for twelve hours for a blood glucose test?
- Specific questions you want answered at the appointment written down with space to write down the doctor's answers

When to See a Specialist



Family practice and general practice doctors are trained in several basic medical areas. They are qualified to diagnose and treat many common illnesses and injuries. However, there may be times when you have an acute or chronic health issue that requires you to seek care from a specialist. It can be confusing to know which doctor to see and when. Talk with your primary care doctor. He or she can help you decide if a specialist visit is necessary.

Specialists are doctors who have completed advanced education and clinical training in specific areas of medicine. This means specialists know things and can do some things your primary care doctor cannot do.

What you may not know is that a visit to a specialist often costs more. Be sure to ask how much more. If you do receive a referral to see a specialist, be prepared. It can help you get your money's worth.

Before you see a specialist:

- Be under the care of a primary doctor.
- Know your diagnosis or expected diagnosis.
- Learn about your basic treatment options.
- Make sure that any test results or records on your case are sent to the specialist.
- Know what your primary care doctor would like the specialist to do (take over the case, confirm the diagnosis, conduct tests, etc.).
- Ask your primary care doctor to remain involved in your care. Ask the specialist to send new test results or course of action to both you and your family doctor.



"Partners 2 Health" is the companywide initiative for employees and their families to work together with Gulfstream to achieve a healthy life and reduce healthcare costs. Under this partnership, Gulfstream will supply the resources (medical plans and health-related information) and families will make informed decisions (taking into consideration that health guidance) to maintain or improve their health. In addition to substituting for the preposition "to" ("Acting as partners will lead to better health"), the "2" signifies the two partners (employees and Gulfstream) and the two phases (short-term and long-term) of everyone's health. Additionally, the "2" represents the two goals of the initiative — the primary goal of better health and the secondary goal of lower healthcare costs.