



Questions to Ask a New Health Care Provider

Finding a new primary care physician can be an overwhelming task especially for those with out-of-the-ordinary health needs. Since many people have primary care physicians who serve most of their needs and can refer them to specialists when necessary, choosing the best “partner” is extremely important.

How do you select a primary care physician, and how do you know if the specialists he or she suggests are the right doctors for you? Asking for recommendations from coworkers, neighbors, and friends is a good way to start, but ultimately you will have to decide which physician is best suited to your individual needs and situation. Primary care physicians may be found among internists, family practitioners, pediatricians and, in some instances, obstetricians and gynecologists.

Before you make your final selection, always check the terms of your insurance coverage to find out whether your plan will cover visits to the physician you are considering. If he or she does not participate in your health plan, you must ask how much you will pay out-of-pocket for visits to this provider. If you have changed jobs and must decide among different health plans offered by your employer, you may want to make your choice of doctor first and then choose the health plan that covers visits to this physician.

Once you think you’ve made your choice, we recommend you make sure it’s a good fit through an “interview” appointment where you speak with the physician about your concerns. You may have to pay a co-payment or other fee for this service, but it can be an invaluable way to gather information when making your decision.

Make a list of your unique concerns to take with you to the interview appointment. Perhaps the following questions can help you to define further what is most important for you:

1. Can I be seen on the same day if I have an urgent need?
2. How long must I wait for an appointment after I call?
3. How much time will you (the physician) block out for my appointments?
4. Have you ever treated someone with needs similar to mine? How many people with disabilities does your practice serve?
5. Do you (the physician) frequently refer patients to specialists or do you prefer to manage the majority of care yourself? How do you involve me (the patient) in decisions about my care?
6. How will you (the physician) follow up on tests or care directed by specialists?



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7. Do you accept my insurance? If so, what is my co-pay amount and which payment methods do you accept? Does the office process insurance claims, or must I pay up-front for services and file the claims myself?
8. What are your regular office days and hours? Do you offer after-hours or weekend appointments? How about drop-in slots?
9. Where are routine x-rays and laboratory studies performed? Can these be done in-office, or will I have to go to an outside laboratory?
10. Is the doctor part of a larger group or in solo practice?
11. Will I be seen by you (the doctor) or another professional like a nurse practitioner?
12. If I call with a question about my care, will a doctor or nurse return my call promptly?
13. Who covers for you (the physician) when you are away?
14. Whom should I call if I have a problem after-hours?
15. Is the practice accessible and are restrooms accessible?
16. Where should I send copies of my records?
17. Does your practice use electronic records?
18. What is the process for getting information from my medical records when I need it? Is there a fee for me to get copies of my records?
19. Which hospital(s) does the doctor use? Am I comfortable with the possibility of being treated at one of these institutions should the need arise?
20. If English is not my primary language, is there someone in the office who will translate for me?

Choosing the right doctor is a very important decision. Yet, many people take more time to compare the quality and price of their next car than they do to select a physician. We sincerely hope that these questions will help you to think about your choice and to save yourself from the stress of a quick decision about your partnership with your primary care physician.

Family Voices of Alabama ♥ Family to Family Health Information Center

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