

Finding and Selecting Your Health Care Providers

Every patient has the right to access the health care providers who best meet their needs. Here are some things to consider when looking for a health care provider:

- **There is a broad spectrum of health care providers**
 - Everyone knows about doctors, but millions of people get quality care from health care professionals who are not doctors of medicine (MDs) or doctors of osteopathy (DOs) like nurse practitioners, therapists, and psychologists to name a few. It's important to learn about the different types of providers available so that you can make informed decisions in selecting the care that best suits you. All licensed health care professionals complete years of education in their respective specialties and meet rigorous licensing and/or certification standards. They have long been recognized by state and federal agencies as qualified and essential contributors to the U.S. health care system and are well-prepared to provide the care you may need.
- **Check what type of insurance programs each provider accepts before your appointment**
 - One of the fundamental questions is whether a provider accepts your insurance. If not, ask about the likely charges and whether the provider has a flexible payment plan. Consider whether another type of provider could help lower your costs if insurance does not cover your care. Also consider if the out of pocket costs for using the provider of your choice will actually result in long-term savings by reducing the expenses of deductibles and co-payments.
- **A “team approach” can be the best approach**
 - Your good health can sometimes depend on health care professionals working together to meet your needs. This “team” approach means that it is crucial to find providers who are willing and able to work with one another to ensure your overall health and wellness.
- **You can request a consultation**
 - Many people don't realize they can request a consultation session *before* a provider examines them. You can sit down and really talk about the provider's philosophy of care and treatment approach. You can even write out a list of questions beforehand and bring them along so that you don't forget anything.
- **Provider availability is important**
 - Difficulty getting an appointment can mean difficulties in getting the care you need. Determine whether health care professionals are accessible to you, both in making appointments and answering questions that may come up between appointments. Does their schedule fit in with your own?
- **You deserve personalized care and attention**
 - Ask your care providers how long an appointment usually lasts to get a sense of how much time, attention and personalized care you will receive. Often, care providers like advanced practice nurses, naturopaths, nurse midwives, and others are able to spend more time with you. A longer appointment will allow you to share more information about your health needs.
- **What kind of health care consumer are you?**
 - With our health care system becoming increasingly fragile and overburdened, consider how this health care professional will help you use the right care, right tests, and right interventions to achieve your best health outcomes. Making certain the professional who helps you has the right qualifications for your needs will prevent overuse of unnecessary care. Accessing care based on its value to you will reduce excess costs and help ensure the sustainability of our health care system in the years to come.