

Choosing the right Family Doctor

What is a Family Doctor?

A primary care provider is a general medical practitioner who will see adults of all ages (or a pediatrician who will see children through adolescents) for uncomplicated and common medical problems. This provider (who can be a doctor, a physician assistant or a nurse-practitioner) will often follow patients over long periods of time and refer them to medical specialists when necessary.

What are some of the alternative names for family doctor?

Family doctor OR Primary care provider OR Doctor

What is the function of the Family Doctor?

Choosing a primary health care provider requires a good understanding of the various health care professions and their respective roles and scopes of practice. It is important for you to have a "primary care provider" to collaborate with in identifying and addressing your comprehensive health care needs. "Primary care" is your *entry door* into the health care system in most non-emergency situations. It encompasses preventive care, health maintenance, identification and management of common conditions, and coordination of consultations and referrals. Primary care is usually provided in outpatient settings (a doctor's office vs a hospital), but the scope of the "primary care provider" may also extend into the hospital setting.

What are the Players in Primary Care?

Doctors of Medicine or Osteopathy (M.D.s or D.O.s) were the only primary care providers recognized within the orthodox health care system. These "primary care doctors" include

General practitioners / family doctors are specialist primarily responsible for the provision of comprehensive and continuing care to every individuals seeking medical care irrespective of age, sex and illness.

Pediatricians – Primary care providers that deal with the branch of medicine that provides the medical care of infants (less than a year old) and children

Internal Medicine - the branch of medicine that deals with the diagnosis and (non surgical) treatment of diseases of the internal organs (in adults)

Physicians who are OB/GYN (obstetrics and gynecology) specialists are frequently considered primary care providers for women. This is because many women see their gynecologists initially for whatever health care problems they encounter.

Why do I need a Family Doctor ?

Having a primary care provider allows you to establish a trusting relationship with one specific medical professional over time, which should allow one to maintain continuity in personal health care, and move from crisis-oriented or acute health care towards preventive care and health promotion and maintenance activities.

Understanding the various types of primary care providers is only a start in choosing a provider. Many insurance plans either limit the provider selection or provide financial incentives for clients to seek care from a select list of providers. Make sure you know what your insurance covers before starting to narrow down your options.

