

In Search Of the Right Doctor

Having a personal doctor with whom you are happy is a key to being satisfied with your healthcare experience. Different people have different requirements in a doctor/patient relationship, so identifying your priorities and what factors are significant to you is the first step in finding the right doctor. There are many skilled doctors with excellent credentials who nevertheless may not be a good fit for you.

Ask friends, relatives and other medical professionals for recommendations, and why they are recommending a particular doctor. You can check whether doctors are board certified by calling The American Board of Medical Specialties at 1-866-275-2267. The Health Plan's Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) network is a good resource, because doctors must be credentialed to meet certain standards, and PPO providers are screened by the PPO. Find doctors on online PPO directory at www.apwuhp.com, or call your PPO—the telephone number is listed on your Member ID card.

There are other factors you may want to consider. What is the doctor's style of communication? Does the doctor give you choices and options, or do they make the decisions and expect you to follow their instructions? Which style are you most comfortable with? Is the doctor located close by, or are you willing to travel a little further if they meet other important requirements?

Does the doctor listen carefully to you, answer your questions, and explain things clearly? How long does it take to get an appointment, how long will you have to wait in the office, does the doctor spend enough time with you on a visit. If you need to talk to the doctor at other times, can you phone or e-mail him or her; and what happens if the doctor is not available, or if you have an emergency after office hours?

Ask questions of those who refer you. Some questions can be answered by calling the doctor's office and asking the staff. Make a list of two or three doctors who look right for you on paper. The rest of your questions should be answered when you make your first visit. If the doctor does not seem right, try another doctor on your list.

Your relationship with your personal doctor is one of the most important relationships you will have, so take the time to find one who is right for you.

Sources: National Institutes of Health, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid