

# Best Methods for Selecting a Health Practitioner

“Finding a personal physician or health practitioner is an important step toward living a healthier lifestyle” says Patsy Jensen, Executive Director of Shawnee Health Service. “The best practitioners offer you a patient centered approach to your care and help you focus on prevention and wellness. They provide creative solutions to health issues and keep you informed about your health conditions.”

**Here are some elements to consider when you are searching for a new doctor or practitioner.**

## MEETING YOUR NEEDS

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Experts recommend selecting a primary care practitioner. This professional might be a physician in Family Medicine or Internal Medicine. Often, primary care physicians have Physician Assistants or Nurse Practitioners working in their offices under their supervision. Under some circumstances, a person may prefer to select a practitioner practicing within a particular specialty. Women might feel more comfortable with an Obstetrician/Gynecologist (OB/GYN) as a primary care physician. A Pediatrician might be the primary care physician for children. Seniors could even have a Geriatrician as their primary care physician. Your primary care practitioner should be able to understand and manage your medical needs, as well as offer you appropriate referrals should you need a specialist.

## INSURANCE OR HEALTH COVERAGE

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Your choice of practitioner may be limited by your health insurance carrier or health coverage. Insurance companies have contracts with individuals or group practices. It is highly likely that you cannot go outside of your insurer's provider network without paying an additional fee. Some insurance carriers do not impose restrictions on your choice of physicians. If you are covered by Medicare (coverage for those over age 65 or those of any age with a disability) or Medicaid (coverage for qualified individuals provided by the State where you live), you should confirm that your practitioner accepts your coverage and will submit claims for you.

## Best Methods for Selecting a Health Practitioner (Continued)

### CONVENIENCE

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Convenience is another important factor when choosing a practitioner. Your practitioner's office should be easily accessible from your home or workplace. You may want to know if your practitioner has admitting privileges at your preferred hospital. Today, most practitioners arrange for a Hospitalist physician to manage your care during a hospital stay.

Ask where your practitioner can perform diagnostic tests and procedures. Some doctors might use a separate facility rather than their own offices.

Find out how the appointment process works at your practitioner's office.

Most medical offices schedule the next visit before you leave the office and provide appointment reminder calls. Many medical offices offer same-day appointments to established patients when an urgent need arises.

Ideally, your first visit will include a routine physical examination and documentation of your medical history. Be prepared to know your previous diagnoses, medications, dates of any medical procedures, surgeries or hospitalizations. If you have a complex medical history, you may want to arrange for a transfer of records to your new medical office.

### ASK FOR REFERRALS

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A recommendation from family, friends, and other trusted sources is the most common way to find a new practitioner. People will gladly give referrals when they have had positive experiences with their health care providers. This may be the best way to learn about a practitioner's practice philosophy, personality and communication skills.

You may want to consider a Federally Qualified Health Center in your community.

In addition to providing primary medical care, they may also offer dental services, nutrition counseling, behavioral health and case management services.

Other resources include web sites for your local hospital or health organizations. Some communities have nurse call centers or you can consult with your local health department to guide you to a particular type of practitioner or medical service. Telephone directories and on-line directories also list physicians by type of specialty.

Not every practitioner accepts new patients. Once you have the name of a practitioner you are interested in, contact their office to make sure they will accept new patients as well as the insurance or coverage you carry and to learn about any matter of importance to you.

You may want to confirm that your practitioner has a current license to practice with the state medical board. This licensing body will also tell you if he or she has any pending disciplinary action or complaints.