

Switching doctors may seem like a daunting task, still it may be necessary when we move or the doctor we usually see retires.

This article provides some tips for locating another primary physician and is useful for senior citizens and those coordinating their elder care.

One of the first things to consider is the type of doctor that is best. Generally, senior citizens can choose among the following for basic healthcare needs:

- **General practitioner:** healthcare providers that have no specific focus and can address a wide range of medical problems
- **Family practitioner:** this is similar to a general practitioner, except they may be more experienced in providing care to a larger variety of age groups
- **Internist:** these physicians practice specifically on adults and have various specialties depending on training
- **Geriatricians:** focus is on senior citizens

Once you know which kind of doctor will fit your needs the best, a good place to start looking is with people you know. Family and friends can provide good first-hand experience and advise about doctors that they see and can make recommendations. Or, if you are already receiving health care services from a different type of provider, such as an in-home health care agency, they may be able to recommend a doctor that they work with. It is good to have a few options in case some of the doctors are not taking new patients. Finally, if this does not prove useful, contacting a hospital, medical society, physician referral service, or medical schools can lead to more names of physicians. If you use Medicare or Medicaid, you may want to check with your plan's membership services office to check the list of doctors they provide for.

Typically, senior citizens who seek healthcare will need medical insurance which pays for visits to the doctor or expensive medical treatments deemed necessary by a physician. Medicare health insurance is a government program that most senior citizens qualify for due to their age and limited resources. Senior citizens with Medicare pay a monthly fee in exchange for hospital and prescription drug coverage, however plans will vary by cost, types of coverage, and eligibility.

Once you find a new doctor and have a secure method of paying for healthcare, your old doctor will facilitate the switch by providing medical records to the new doctor that you choose. However, make sure that you have visited the new doctor and are certain that you wish to switch to that particular one.

It is important to look for doctors who are trained, competent, and take the time to get to know you. This type of relationship with a doctor is the most conducive to preventing health issues and efficiently managing existing health issues. To find this kind of information about a doctor, it is helpful to call the offices where these doctors work. Office receptionists can give information about:

- Office policies (what types of patients they see, walk-in hours, appointments, etc.)
- Insurance the office takes / whether they file insurance claims for you
- Payment methods / whether they take Medicare
- Local hospitals that work with the office for patients who need diagnostic work or treatment
- Board certification of the doctor(s) who work at the office for specialties that they practice
- Communication skills of the doctor, how well she/he will explain things or listen to you
- Location of the doctor's office
- Whether the lab work is done at the office or another location, which would determine if the patient has to travel to other locations
- Types and number of doctors working at the office
- Coverage when the doctor is out of town or unavailable
- Whether the doctor(s) see senior citizens often or others who may experience your specific health problems
- Whether the doctor(s) makes referrals to other specialists
- Whether the doctor(s) treats conditions most similar to yours

After researching the physician and calling the doctor's office, make an appointment. To prepare for the first appointment, it is a good idea to make a list of questions that you may still have about your own health concerns as well as any extra information about the doctor. It is also a good idea to have a list of medications, vitamins, or other non-food supplements aken regularly.

During the appointment, a nurse will usually see you first in order to take blood pressure and explain procedures if you are having trouble taking medications. When the doctor sees you, they will ask about your medical history or medical problems that have been in your family. They will then examine you. It is important to be prepared with medical records, lists of allergies you are aware of, or other information you think may be relevant for your doctor to know. Here are some questions that some people find helpful to ask their doctors:

- Will you give me written instructions about my care?
- May I bring a family member to doctor's visits?
- Are you willing to talk to my family about my medical conditions?
- Will you maintain my privacy if I ask you not to discuss my condition with anyone else?

After the appointment, make your own assessment about the quality of the visit. If you found the doctor helpful and easy to talk to, then you may want to stay with that doctor. Otherwise, you can make appointments with other doctors until you find one that fits your needs. Most importantly, you should find someone that you can work with and form a relationship with in order to make treating and diagnosing possible medical issues the most efficient.