

How to Find the Right Doctor for You

by Barbara Stahura



The first step is to decide what type of doctor is best for you

- ✓ General Internal Medicine/Family Practice
- ✓ Geriatric Specialist.

Chances are good that most TTNers will never need a Geriatrician as their primary care physician, even if they live to an advanced age. However, you may have a family member or friend with multiple chronic diseases, medication-related side effects, memory problems, frailty or difficulty performing activities of daily living. The patient's condition may be causing them and their caregiver's significant stress and strain. A Geriatric Specialist can provide much more support for this type of patient.

The Geriatrician, working with a team of healthcare professionals, will holistically evaluate all aspects of the patient's condition – including physical and mental health, nutrition, and living arrangements - and coordinate a plan to optimize and maintain their health. The Geriatric team includes family and friends in the care plan and meets with them regularly.

Several of the Academic Medical Centers in New York City have excellent Departments of Geriatrics. They can be contacted to identify Geriatricians who are accepting new patients.

Most women 50 and beyond can utilize a General Internal Medicine or Family Practice physician for preventive care, minor illnesses, and coordination of care provided by medical specialists.

Whether the primary care doctor you are seeking practices Internal or Family Medicine, or Geriatrics.

The first step is to ask for recommendations from friends, neighbors, relatives, and, if you belong to the Caring Collaborative, fellow CC members.

- ✓ Then consult your insurance plan's website to determine which of the recommended MDs are listed as members of your insurance network.
- ✓ Identify several MDs with an office near your home for further research.

Call each office directly to confirm:

1. Is the doctor accepting new patients?





2. Which hospital(s) does the doctor use?
 3. Would the doctor take care of you in the hospital?
 4. What days and hours is the doctor at that office; does she/he have multiple office locations?
 5. How many other primary care doctors are members of the practice; do they cover each other's patients?
- ✓ How long is the wait for a routine appointment; are same-day visits available for an urgent condition?
 - ✓ Does the office have an electronic medical record (EMR); is the EMR data accessible to you via a "patient portal"?
 - ✓ Can you communicate with the doctor by e-mail?

Make a "New Patient" appointment to meet the doctor who seems to be the best match for you. After the visit, rate the doctor on these qualities:

- ✓ Did the doctor listen to me, ask questions, and fully answer my questions?
- ✓ Did the doctor perform a thorough physical exam and explain any positive findings?
- ✓ Did the doctor seem confident that she/he could coordinate my future care with specialty MDs?

Also rate the doctor's office on these qualities:

- ✓ Was the staff friendly, efficient and professional?
- ✓ Were you able to be seen by the doctor without a long wait?

If you can answer "yes", you have found your new PCP. If not, make an appointment to meet with another MD on your list.

A comfortable relationship with a primary care physician is an important foundation for continued good health. Invest the time to find the right doctor for you before you face a significant health crisis.

