

**W**hen choosing a family doctor, it's wise to find one that suits your own particular needs and lifestyle, and who takes an interest in you as a person. A good doctor/patient relationship is one that considers both your emotional and physical health. Your doctor is there to assist you in promoting your overall health, enable you to gain access to medical specialists when necessary, and help in maintaining control and preventive care over chronic ailments such as asthma or diabetes.

#### *How do you go about finding a good family physician?*

- The best time to look is when you are well. Don't wait until you or a family member are sick and it's too late to shop around for the right doctor for you and your family.
- Ask trusted friends or colleagues. If you've moved to a new neighbourhood, ask your neighbours, local pharmacist or another health profession..

#### *Points you may want to consider...*

- Is the doctor's office within easy access to your home?
- Is parking available or is public transportation available nearby?
- Is the office easily accessible by people with canes, crutches or wheelchairs?
- Are lab and x-ray facilities accessible nearby?
- Are office hours convenient for your schedule?
- In an emergency, are you quickly fitted in?
- Are home visits available, if really needed?
- If there is an emergency at night, on weekends or at other off-office times, who will attend?
- Does the doctor have admitting privileges?

#### *Once you are at the doctor's office...*

- Is the atmosphere friendly and welcoming?
- Is the office staff (nurse/receptionist) courteous and helpful?
- Is the waiting room clean?

#### *What you can expect from the doctor...*

- Up-to-date knowledge and skill

- Confidentiality
- A relaxed, empathetic, non-intimidating atmosphere in which to discuss your problems and concerns
- Patience and a gentle attitude during any examination or procedure
- A full explanation of what is being done
- A willingness to answer questions at your level of understanding
- Access to care outside of the office, in medical emergencies or home visits, by the doctor or a chosen alternate
- Prompt return of urgent phone calls
- Information on how and when test results will be divulged
- Referral to other medical specialists, if required
- The prescribing of medications when required, with an explanation of what each does and any possible side effects
- Full, appropriate disclosure in *understandable* language of any diagnosis, treatment option(s) and the likely outcome
- The right to be fully informed prior to any decisions made on your behalf
- The acceptance of your right to refuse any medical treatment after being informed of the risks/benefits without harming the doctor-patient relationship
- A relationship based on trust and partnership

#### *What the doctor should be able to expect from you...*

- Honest communications about all aspects of your health - exercise, diet, smoking, alcohol/drug use, known diseases, allergies and medications (both prescription and over-the-counter)
- An understanding that the doctor has certain time constraints and that delays may occur
- That the doctor can't deal with every problem in only one visit; that special appointments should be made to discuss the details of any additional concerns
- That instructions will be followed, or if not, an explanation given as to why not
- The return for follow-up care when required or requested

- That pre-arranged appointments for tests, office visits, specialist consultations and hospital procedures are kept or are cancelled within a *reasonable* timeframe
- That careful attention is paid during your visit with the doctor and that you understand the medical care provided to you
- That you adhere to the instructions given regarding any medications prescribed
- That the doctor will be informed of the results of any treatments, therapies or medications and of any problems if they occur

#### *Please remember....*

**I**t is important to establish a relationship with one primary doctor who can coordinate your total health care. Specialists, hospital emergency departments and walk-in clinics do not have access to your complete medical history which could be important in any long term care or treatment that you receive. Most will treat your immediate problem and suggest that you see your family doctor for follow-up and continued management of your health care.

## WHEN YOU VISIT YOUR DOCTOR.....

*Inform the doctor's office of any change in your address or telephone number.*

***Make time for your appointment***

*Anticipate delays...* the doctor may have been delayed by an emergency, at the hospital or by another patient.

***Request a special appointment*** or longer consultation ahead of time, if needed, remembering that doctors can only discuss one or two problems at any one visit.

***Provide your doctor with a short clear list*** of symptoms or medical concerns that you may have; try to list the most important ones first.

***Record what the doctor says...*** this will help you remember important information and instructions and help you in making informed decisions regarding your medical care.

***Take along any medications*** - both prescription and over-the-counter that you are currently taking.

***If you are elderly, needing assistance*** consider bringing along a friend or relative.

***Make sure that you understand*** what the doctor is telling you, the diagnosis and treatment...ask the doctor to re-explain, if you don't understand.

***Ask the doctor if you can call*** or make an appointment if you have further questions.

***Remember...*** it is your right and responsibility to be as informed as possible about your medical care.

### ***If medications are prescribed:***

***Record the generic and brand name*** of each medicine and ask about possible side effects.

***Make sure that you have informed the doctor*** of any other medications that you are taking or have taken and any problems that you experienced.

***Ask what each drug is supposed to do,*** how long to take it, when to take it, and how soon and what to expect in terms of relief and improvement of your symptoms.

***Ask about side effects*** and what to do if any unpleasant or dangerous side effects occur.

***Store medications properly...*** a bathroom medicine cabinet may not be the best place because of the high humidity, the refrigerator may be too cold and family members may take the medication by mistake.

***Discard any old or unused medications*** ...drugs lose their effectiveness over time.

***Don't re-use old prescribed medications...*** if the same health problem re-develops, see your doctor and get a new prescription.

***Never share medications with others.***

# TIPS ON CHOOSING A FAMILY DOCTOR

Surgeons

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