

Choosing a Doctor

Selecting a doctor is an important step in Health Care for you and your family. Friends' impressions and experiences are a good place to start, but draw up a list of important factors you want to consider. For example:

— **Education and Training.** Where did the doctor get his or her medical training? Is the doctor board-certified? While not a mandate, board certification is becoming a norm. A doctor who is board-certified has gone through extra testing and evaluation with one of the 24 boards recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties and the American Medical Association.

— **Qualifications.** What kind of doctor are you searching for? Do you need or want a doctor who specializes in one area of treatment? For example, parents may see a General Practitioner, but take their children to a Pediatrician.

— **Insurance.** Before making an appointment, find out how much the doctor charges for office visits and if he will accept your health insurance plan. Ask if the doctor's office will process your claims. Some health care plans have a list of "approved" doctors.

— **Convenience.** Getting to appointments on time is easier if you don't have to travel a long distance to the doctor's office. Look for someone near your home or office. If you have transportation issues, how will you or your family get there?

— **Hospitals.** Serious health issues may require hospitalization. At which hospital does the doctor have practicing privileges? If the doctor doesn't have practicing privileges at the hospital of your choice, it may be a problem.

— **Lab work.** Does the doctor do his own tests? Is there a lab in the same office complex, or do you have to go to another location for them?

— **Coverage.** Ask who will see you when the doctor is out of town or unavailable. At times, someone else in the medical practice may fill in for your regular doctor, and you need to be comfortable with that person.

— **Office Hours.** When does the doctor see patients? How can you contact the doctor in an after-hours emergency?

— **Sharing information.** Sometimes you want your family to know your medical information. If that is the case, ask the doctor if he will share that information with them.

Before Your Visit

Make a list of all medications, vitamins, and supplements that you take to give to the doctor. Include the dates you began taking the prescription medications, who prescribed them, why, and the dosages in milligrams. The MED FORM can help you keep track. It is available at www.themedform.com.

After Your Visit

Ask yourself about the way the doctor communicated with you. You want a doctor who will take time with you and your family – someone who listens to your concerns, answers your questions, and explains things clearly and fully.

Primary Care Doctors

- **General practitioners** see patients with a wide range of medical problems and do not focus on any one area of medicine.
- **Family practitioners** have extra training to focus on health care for all family members, regardless of age.
- **Internists** accept only adults as patients. Some take additional training to become specialists. Cardiologists are internists who treat people with heart problems.
- **Pediatricians** treat children from the time they're born until they're teenagers.
- **Geriatricians** specialize in caring for senior adults. They have family practice or internal medicine backgrounds with additional training on senior care.

Making the Decision

If you have health insurance, ask your health care plan provider or human resources office for a list of the doctors who accept it. Friends, family and especially co-workers may have recommendations. Once you narrow the list, call the doctors' offices to see if they are accepting new patients.

You can view the online profile of any doctor licensed by the Arizona Medical Board by going to the Board's web site, www.azmd.gov. Simply type in the last name of a doctor in the blank search window at the upper right corner of the home page. The profile provides information about the number of years a doctor has practiced in Arizona – where the doctor went to college – what post-graduate training he has – and whether he is board-certified in a specialty. Under Board Actions and Investigations, you can see if there were any past Board actions against the doctor – including non-disciplinary Advisory Letters. If the board took any disciplinary action against the doctor's license, the profile will tell you what it was, when, and why.

Referral Organizations

If you're still unsure, check with the following local and national referral organizations. They can help you find doctors with certain specialties near you and provide recommendations for their member doctors.

Arizona Medical Association

(602) 246-8901/(800) 482-3480 (toll-free)

Web site: www.azmedassn.org

Maricopa County Medical Society

Referral line: (602) 252-2844

Web site: www.medical-society.com

Pima County Medical Society

795-7985

Web site: www.pimamedicalsociety.org

American Medical Association

- 621-8335

Web site: www.ama-assn.org

