# Before your visit: Tips for patients seeking medical care



Research your options



Establish

open communication



Advocate

for yourself and others

### What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide shares some ways to ensure you receive appropriate care. The information provided here is meant to help you:

- Learn important information about your physician
- Find out about your medical conditions and appropriate treatments
- Advocate for yourself and loved ones
- Understand the importance of having a doctor you trust

### Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed to help all patients. This guide can help people who are:

- Looking for a new doctor, surgeon, or other specialist
- Looking for more information about their doctor
- Parents and caregivers
- Professional patient advocates





- Selecting a Doctor
- Informing Expectations & Choices



## Selecting a Doctor



Not everyone has the option to choose their doctor ahead of time, or there may be limited choices in some cases. Even if your choices of a healthcare provider are limited, the information provided here can still help you by informing you what to expect during an appointment, or where to find more information. It may encourage you to ask questions. When possible, research a physician's history before you make your first appointment for yourself or a loved one. Here are some options to help you with researching:





1

BOARD CERTIFICATION

2

STATE MEDICAL BOARDS



ONLINE RESOURCES



#### **BOARD CERTIFICATION**



### While not all doctors are board certified...

Board certified doctors are required to meet nationally recognized standards that are above what is required for basic medical licensure. However, just because a doctor is not certified does not mean they are less able or qualified to care for you.





The American Board of Medical Specialties offers a website called <u>Certification Matters</u>, where you can enter your physician's information and find out if your doctor is board certified.



## STATE MEDICAL BOARDS





Post records of disciplinary cases online. You can check if a physician has malpractice claims or if they have been investigated for sexual misconduct, substance abuse, negligence or other wrongdoing.

Keep in mind however that often meetings in which physicians are reprimanded are confidential and not made public.

Federation of State Medical Boards

See the <u>Federation of</u>
<u>State Medical Boards</u>
<u>website</u> for information
on how to get in contact
with your State Medical
Board.







#### **ONLINE RESOURCES**



### A Well-Guided Internet Search...

Is often helpful in finding news or police reports, court records, or even social media posts that patients have written to inform others about quality of care.





#### **Health Grades**

<u>HealthGrades.com</u> provides information about physicians, including board certification, disciplinary actions, patient reviews, and more.

#### **Insurance providers**

Insurance companies have websites that can tell you whether a physician, drug, or treatment is covered by your insurance. Many offer patient reviews for physicians in their network.

#### **Open Payments Data**

Manufacturers of drugs, medical devices, or biologics are required to disclose their financial relationships with physicians. The <u>Open Payments Data website</u> allows patients to see how much money a physician has accepted from corporations in the pharmaceutical and medical device industry. Feel free to ask your doctor about these relationships if you think it could affect your care.

## Informing Expectations & Choices





Educational websites can tell you when and why doctors recommend them. Here are some resources that can provide you with trustworthy health information.

#### But be careful!

There are countless websites offering health advice online, many of which contain information that is outdated, inaccurate, or unproven. Online resources are not appropriate for diagnosing illness, and they should never replace a visit with a doctor.



#### **Choosing Wisely**

Created by the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation, the *Choosing Wisely website* has many patient resources to guide choices on a variety of medical procedures, treatments, and exams—including pelvic exams and opioid use after surgery.

#### **Mayo Clinic**

Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit organization dedicated to clinical practice, research, and education in healthcare. The Mayo Clinic website provides detailed information about many diseases, procedures, and treatments that can help inform your expectations before an appointment.

#### **Centers for Disease Control and** Prevention

The CDC is a federal agency committed to health promotion, prevention, and preparedness in the U.S. The *CDC website* provides guidelines and recommendations for many drugs and procedures that can help you made educated choices about your care.







## Research

your options



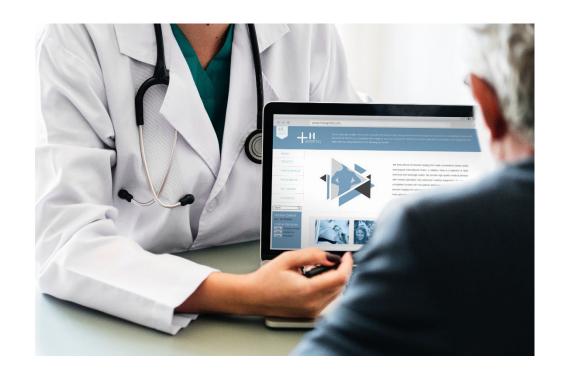


## Get a Second Opinion

## Talking to more than one doctor can be a good idea...

When you are not clear about your options, your diagnosis, or how well an expensive test or treatment will work.

Don't worry about offending your doctor—second opinions are part of standard medical practice. Your doctor will want you to have the best information to make your decisions.





open communication



Asking Questions





## The Importance of Trust



### **TRUST**

is the foundation of your relationship with your doctor.

When you trust your physician, there are better health outcomes for you, your family, your community, and the greater public.



#### **Personal Health Benefits**

Patients who trust their doctors are more likely to take their medications as directed or follow a doctor's advice about things like exercise, flu shots, or smoking cessation



#### **Public Health Benefits**

When groups of patients have more trust, they are diagnosed and receive care sooner because they are more comfortable seeking care and getting tested



#### **Benefits to Science & Medicine**

High levels of physician trust also encourage patients like you to participate in research that leads to breakthroughs in treating diseases such as cancer or diabetes





## Asking Questions

If you have questions or concerns about when an exam, procedure, or drug is appropriate, ask.

If you don't understand or aren't comfortable with your physician's recommendation, ask to speak to a nurse or other healthcare professional in the office before agreeing to the exam or procedure. Some people may feel shy or nervous about asking a question, but as a patient, you have the right to ask questions about things you do not understand.

#### Agency for Healthcare & Research Quality

If you're not sure what questions to ask your doctor, the <u>AHRQ website</u> can provide templates for the kinds of questions you should ask your doctor before, during, and after your appointment. It can even produce a list of questions for you after you enter some more detailed information about your appointment.







## Advocate

for yourself and others



- Requesting or Serving as a Chaperone
- Responding to Unacceptable Treatment





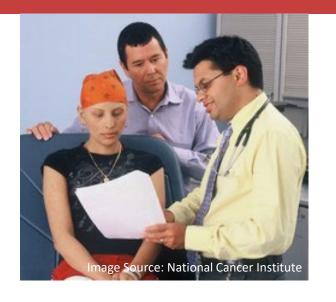
## Requesting or Serving as a Chaperone





## When a doctor needs to perform a physical exam...

You may request that a chaperone be present, even if you have a loved one with you. A chaperone is an individual whose role is to independently observe the exam or procedure and to assist the doctor-patient relationship. A chaperone may be a trained medical professional or a trusted loved one of the patient. Having a chaperone may make you feel more comfortable or prevent misunderstandings. A doctor should not refuse your request for a chaperone.



### When acting as a chaperone for another person...

Make sure you understand what is routine and appropriate during intimate examinations. If the physician does not provide an explanation about what is occurring during the exam and why you have a right to ask. Patients should always be given an explanation for what is occurring and why during physical examinations. They should also be given privacy while undressing and provided with gowns or draping. Chaperones should reassure the patient if needed and respect the patient's confidentiality.



### Responding to Abuse



Some patients have received unacceptable or illegal treatment from their healthcare provider. This includes cases of abuse, assault, or fraud. Experiencing abuse by a healthcare provider is rare—more than likely, your doctor is a good doctor. However, if you suspect or have experienced mistreatment, there are resources available to help you address the situation:



#### **Patient Advocates**

Are healthcare professionals who act as a spokesperson for patients and help guide them through the healthcare system. Many hospitals and nonprofit organizations employ patient advocates who can help you make educated health decisions, and may help you find financial, legal, and social support. The <a href="Patient Advocate Foundation website">Patient Advocate Foundation website</a>, or hotline (800.532.5274)

can provide more information about what a patient advocate can do for you, and connect you with patient advocacy services.

#### **State Medical Boards**

Are responsible for investigating and enforcing consequences for physicians who fail to meet the ethical standards of the profession. Reporting serious lapses in professionalism, such as abusive behavior or assault, is the best option to ensure a bad-acting doctor is reprimanded and prevented from mistreating future patients. Contact information for your state medical board is listed on the <a href="Federation of State">Federation of State</a>
<a href="Medical Boards website">Medical Boards website</a>.</a>

### Resources Cited

#### **Selecting a Doctor**

- The American Board of Medical Specialties offers a website <u>Certification</u>
   <u>Matters</u>, where you can enter your physician's information and find out if
   your doctor is board certified.
- Contact information for your state medical board is listed on the <u>Federation</u> of State Medical Boards website.
- <u>HealthGrades.com</u> provides information about physicians, including board certification, disciplinary actions, patient reviews, and more.
- As part of the Sunshine Act, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services
   offers their <u>Open Payments Data</u> website, where patients can see how much
   money a physician has accepted from corporations in the pharmaceutical &
   medical device industry.

#### **Informing Expectations & Choices**

- Created by the ABIM Foundation, the <u>Choosing Wisely website</u> has many patient resources to guide choices on a variety of medical procedures, treatments, and exams—including pelvic exams and opioid use after surgery.
- The <u>Mayo Clinic website</u> provides detailed information about many diseases, procedures, and treatments that can help inform your expectations before an appointment.
- The <u>CDC website</u> provides guidelines and recommendations for many drugs and procedures that can help you made educated choices about your care.

#### **Asking Questions**

If you're not sure what questions to ask your doctor, the <u>AHRQ website</u>
can provide templates for the kinds of questions you should ask your
doctor before, during, and after your appointment.

#### **Responding to Mistreatment**

- The <u>Patient Advocate Foundation website</u> can provide more information about what a patient advocate can do for you, and connect you with patient advocacy services. You can also call the Patient Advocate Foundation at (800) 532-5274.
- Reporting serious lapses in professionalism, such as abusive behavior or assault, is the best option to ensure a bad-acting doctor is reprimanded and prevented from mistreating future patients. Contact information for your state medical board is listed on the <u>Federation of State Medical</u> <u>Boards website</u>.



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#### SUGGESTED CITATION

Bioethics Research Center (2019). Before Your Next Visit: Tips for Patients Seeking Medical Care. Retrieved from: www.beforeyourvisit.org.