

CHOOSING A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

Shopping around for the best price and level of service is a hallmark of America's consumer nature. Whether purchasing a house or a car or laundry detergent, most Americans are on the look-out for the best deal possible. However, many never stop to consider how important it might be to shop around for the right health care provider.

Choosing a health provider may be a difficult task for some people. No matter if you are looking to change your current provider or if you are looking for a health provider for the first time, keep the following in mind:

- Do I need to see a physician? In many areas of Texas there is a shortage of medical doctors. In their stead, qualified practitioners, such as a Nurse Practitioner or Physician's Assistant, may be your best source for health care.
- Is my health provider "board certified?" Board certification means that your provider has had extra training in a specific area of medicine, such as Internal Medicine or Cardiology.
- Does the health provider accept your insurance? Many health providers accept Medicare and Medicaid but may do so at different amounts, affecting what you pay out-of-pocket. Check with the provider's office to see what your costs may be before the visit. If you have private insurance, check with the insurance company to see if they will pay for you to see a certain health provider. Also check with the health provider's office to make sure that he or she will accept your insurance.
- Where is the office located? Location of a health provider's office is very important. Is it close to your home? Close to a hospital? Close to a pharmacy? Is it located on a busy street that could cause travel problems to and from office visits?

After the initial decision to try a health provider is made, be sure that he or she has a good bedside manner and communication style. It is very important that your new health provider is able to answer your questions fully and that you are able to understand those answers. Some questions you may want to ask include:

- Will you provide my health instructions in writing?
- May I bring a friend or family member with me?
- Is there someone in your office "on call" 24 hours per day?

When choosing a new health provider or thinking about changing health providers, it is very important to see what other people think about that person. Ask friends, family and neighbors if they have had any experience with the provider in question and what that experience has been. Talking with other people about their interaction with a health provider may be able to give you some insight into what your experience with him or her may be.

In Texas, you can check a physician's record through the Texas State Board of Medical

Examiners (TSBME). The TSBME is the licensing organization for physicians and physician's assistants. It provides information about schooling, licensing, complaints and any type of sanctions or suspension. The TSBME maintains this information through their website: <http://www.tsbme.state.tx.us>. You may also file a complaint about a health provider with the TSBME by calling 1.800.248.4062.

Ensuring quality health care from a quality health provide may be one of the most important decisions that you make. After all, good health is one of the keys to successful aging! It's your choice – make it a good one.

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