



What to Look for When Choosing a Primary Care Doctor

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It used to be that choosing a doctor was simple. You automatically went to the same doctor your parents went to. There was no decision to be made because it was already made for you. The doctor knew who you were and was familiar with your family’s health history because he had a close relationship with you and other families in the community.

Fast-forward to today and you’ll see that times have changed and healthcare has changed with it. The language of primary care has become more complicated. Primary care physicians now include family practitioners, obstetricians and gynecologists, internal medicine specialists, and physician assistants.

Many families are finding it difficult to find a quality, evidence-based practice that meets their needs. Healthcare and insurance rules have made it difficult to decipher good primary care doctors from the not-so-good doctors. This guide will help you find the right doctor for your family.

Why is This Guide Necessary?

This guide exists to help patients decide what is important to them when looking for a primary care doctor. A primary care physician is the medical professional that is likely to spend the

most time with you as a patient during the course of your lifetime, and is likely to have access to most of your medical history. The guide is meant to empower you, the patient, with key questions to ask a medical facility before making your first appointment.

Many of the problems associated with finding a good doctor are the same across the country:

- You are lucky to find a doctor who can remember you from one visit to the next.
- Making appointments has become a much more complicated process.
- Some appointments are made 30 to 60 days from the date of your call.
- Doctors’ offices are overcrowded.

Once you finally get in to see the doctor, your visit feels more like going through an assembly line rather than a real conversation about your health.



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The advent of the Affordable Care Act has many medical experts and healthcare administrators believing that healthcare can improve in a number of ways, but only for those medical providers that are prepared to take advantage of the opportunity. Requiring that all Americans have health insurance means that more people will have access to the healthcare they need. However, it could also mean an exacerbation of many of the problems that already exist—one of which is finding high quality primary care.

Why Is It Difficult to Find a Good Primary Care Physician?

Given all the problems with the healthcare system as it exists today, many families are left asking the same question:

Why is it so difficult to find the right primary care doctor for your needs?

The problem with healthcare is that there simply aren't enough doctors to go around. The Association of American Medical Colleges reports that Americans needed 13,700 more medical doctors than were available in 2010. That gap is expected to grow to 130,600 by the year 2025. Half of that number represents the shortfall in primary care physicians (Fitzgerald, 2013). This statistic is devastating for patients for many reasons.

1. As the population ages, more people will need healthcare. Medicine and technology allow people to live longer. The longer they live, the more often they will need the services of a primary care doctor.
2. Many medical offices are not taking new patients. Some of the largest medical systems in North Carolina have reached patient capacity and will not be able to take on new patients in the next year.
3. The Affordable Care Act will bring an influx of new patients into an already crowded system. The Affordable Care Act requires all Americans to apply for health coverage. This will result in more Americans seeking the services of a primary care physician.
4. The quality of primary care is expected to decline. Fewer primary care physicians in a crowded system will result in poorer care for patients. Patients can expect longer waiting times, less time with providers, more appointments with students or residents, more difficulty scheduling an appointment at convenient times, etc.

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3 Keys to Choosing a Primary Care Provider

Given all these problems within healthcare, it is up to patients to work the system to find a primary care physician that meets their needs.

Here are three keys to identifying a good primary care physician:

- Customer service
- Philosophy of patient care
- The provider's reputation

Let's examine these keys one by one.

Customer Service

This is important to patients who are looking for the best in primary care. As a patient, you have a right to expect a high level of service and attention from your primary care physician and their supporting team. Taking note of how well people treat you before you enter the examination room is an important part of the patient experience.

How do you know good customer service when you see it?

- Are the doctors, nurses, and other staff friendly and helpful?
- Does the staff return your phone calls and/or emails?
- Are the office hours convenient for your lifestyle?
- Can you reach your provider after hours?
- Does the provider's communication style work with your personality?
- Is the office clean and professional looking?
- How long do you have to wait before getting an appointment?

By taking the time to ask these questions, you will know what kind of experience you are looking for when you're searching for a new primary care physician. You may find that many of your experiences with healthcare providers have been unsatisfactory.

Philosophy of Care

Your doctor's philosophy of patient care in family medicine is an extension of good customer service. Some medical offices choose to hold on to old ways of doing business, which were a bigger benefit to the physician and insurance companies

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rather than the patient. However, newer models of health care are more patient-centered, putting the focus of the system on what works for patients and their families.

What is your doctor’s philosophy of patient care?

- Does your doctor focus on wellness and the prevention of chronic illnesses?
- Does your doctor take a conservative or aggressive approach to treatment of common ailments?
- Does your doctor order lots of tests to determine a problem?
- Does your doctor use the latest technology to diagnose, monitor, or treat you?
- Is your doctor opposed to using technology to communicate with you and other specialists concerning your records?
- Does your doctor put you at the center of all decisions concerning your care?



A patient-centered model of care is vastly different from what exists in most primary care offices today. Make a list of your priorities when it comes to your health and honestly ask yourself if your needs are being met with your current or past providers.

Provider’s Reputation

Your healthcare provider’s reputation speaks volumes. However, some patients put more thought and energy into learning about the reputation of their hair stylist than they do their primary care doctor. What questions do you have about your doctor’s reputation?

- Does your primary care physician have an established relationship with specialists?
- What do the doctor’s colleagues say about them?
- What do past patients have to say about their experience with the doctor?

The Internet has made it easy to learn more about a doctor’s reputation. Word-of-mouth also still works. Don’t be afraid to ask your family members, friends, and colleagues at work about their experiences working with a doctor or specialist you are researching.

How Does Chapel Hill Primary Care Fit the Bill?

Chapel Hill Primary Care offers the highest standards in personalized primary care in the Chapel Hill, NC area. Our primary care physicians provide preventive care,



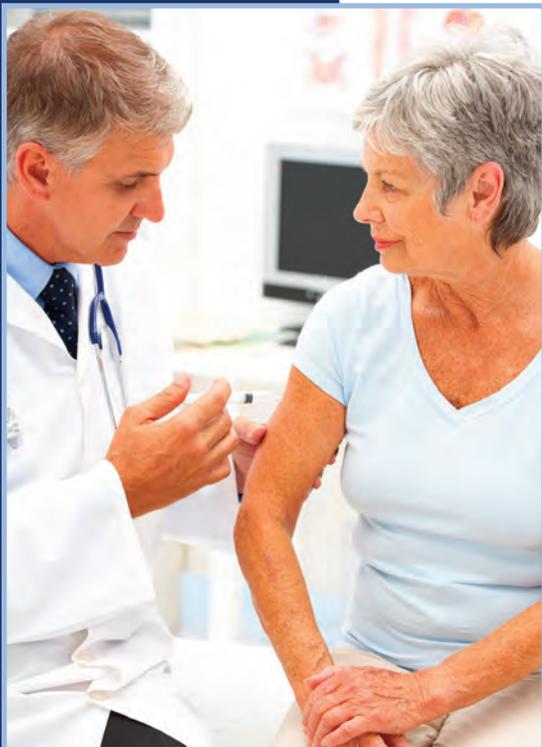
“At Chapel Hill Primary Care, our patients lead the way. We want to make it easier for you to get the care you need to be well.”

management of chronic medical conditions and treatment of acute symptoms and current ailments. Services include annual physical examinations, immunizations, chronic disease management, and women’s health services.

We take the time to get to know each one of our patients, giving us the opportunity to tailor your care to your needs. All of our patients are offered the convenience of:

- On-site laboratory facilities
- No facility fees
- A helpful staff of doctors and associates
- A commitment to minimal or no wait times
- Free parking and first floor convenience
- A close relationship with specialists and therapists that serve as our referral partners
- A convenient location that is minutes from I-40 in northern Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill Primary Care associates are also proud to refer you to an integrative medicine specialist if needed. Integrative medicine combines the practices of alternative medicine with conventional biomedicine to create a plan of treatment and preventative care that meets the needs of the patient.



In Summary

Finding a good primary care physician in North Carolina’s Chapel Hill area will soon become tougher than it has been in recent years. You can expect to experience more difficulties finding practices taking on new patients, longer waiting periods for scheduling an appointment, overcrowded waiting rooms, and an overall decrease in quality of patient care.

Chapel Hill Primary Care is well positioned to meet many of the challenges that make seeing a doctor more difficult than it should be. It is our philosophy of patient care that most separates us from other primary care physician offices in the Chapel Hill area. At Chapel Hill Primary Care, our patients lead the way. We want to make it easier for you to get the care you need to be well.

Do you have questions about making Chapel Hill Primary Care your new primary care provider? Call us at (919) 929-7990 or visit our offices at 55 Vilcom Center Drive, Boyd Hall, Suite 110, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

Sources

1. Fitzgerald, Michael. (2013, October 13). Why is it so hard to find a doctor? The Boston Globe.

Retrieved from <http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2013/10/12/why-hard-find-doctor/AZmAhh8DJowD63cIVF0vPO/story.html>



About Chapel Hill Primary Care

Chapel Hill Primary Care offers a broad spectrum of comprehensive healthcare services for patients 15 years of age and older, including traditional primary care, long term preventive care, integrative medicine, diagnostic lab work, chronic disease management and women's health services. We appreciate that each patient is unique, and we utilize evidence-based, best medical practices to address our patients' health concerns. Chapel Hill Primary Care has an on-site lab, no facility fees, and an attentive, supportive staff. When you need a partner in healthcare, we're here for you.

55 Vilcom Center Drive
Suite 110
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Ph: (919) 929-7990
Fax: (919) 951-7855
ChapelHillPrimaryCare.com

