

WHY DO I NEED A PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN? And How Do I Find a Good One?

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At OMC, we do everything we can to keep you healthy and productive through our extensive health promotions programming as well as our annual comprehensive physical examinations and medical surveillance program. Many employees enjoy the close rapport they have developed with the physicians at OMC and prefer to think of us as their primary doctors. Although the clinic served this primary care role in the early days of the Lab when there were few doctors in the local community, we are unable to do so nowadays due to the specialized functions we serve for DOE, the Laboratory and its employees.

We hope the information below will convince you how important it is to your health for you have a primary care doctor, and help you to find one.

The Functions of a Primary Care Physician (PCP):

Your PCP must be available to:

- *Diagnose and treat personal medical problems*
- *Provide you with care when you fall ill when the Lab is not open*
- *Provide preventive medical screenings based on medical risk factors or family history and if such screenings detect an early-stage condition, provide appropriate treatment or referral*
- *Admit you to a hospital, if needed*
- *Provide formal written referrals to specialists if that is part of your health insurance plan*
- *Provide pre-surgical clearances*
- *Coordinate the efforts of various specialists who may be diagnosing and treating your medical problems. A PCP can be a valuable source of information about less expensive generic medications or various drug interactions and their effects.*
- *See you in emergency situations so that you can avoid using the Emergency Room for non-emergency care, saving you time and dollars. A good rapport with a PCP will mean that your personal medical history will be known and taken into consideration when an emergency arises.*

Primary Care Physicians can be chosen from the following specialties:

- Internal Medicine: provide medical (non-surgical) care to adults, including disease screening/prevention services, as well as treatment of health conditions;
- Family Medicine: provide adult medicine services, however, their practice has a broader scope which may include OB-GYN services and pediatrics.
- OB-GYN: for women of child-bearing age.

Finding a PCP:

- Get recommendations from friends or family members who like their doctor;

- Ask at OMC for recommendations from the feedback we compile from other employees. Please note that you must personally verify to see if any of these doctors we recommend are in your personal health insurance network, since doctors may join or leave networks at different times according to the needs of their practice. Most people choose to see doctors who are participating in their network because of the financial incentives to do so.
- On-line directories from your insurance plan. Go to: www.mycigna.com, www.vytra.com, www.aetna.com or www.hipusa.com. You will be asked to give your zip code and draw a radius of miles you would be comfortable travelling to a doctor. Once you get a few choices you should research your choice a bit further by verifying with a call to the doctor's office if they are still in your plan's network, and most importantly, *if they are currently accepting new patients*.
- Once a choice is selected, you can go to the NYS sponsored website: www.nydoctorprofile.com. At this site, you can "Search for a Physician" to verify Education, Practice Information, Legal Actions, and Professional Activities.
- It is often a good idea to "road-test" a primary care physician by scheduling an appointment for a physical examination on a non-emergency basis, in order to be able to get a sense of the office, procedures, etc.
- Other items to consider when choosing a Primary Care Physician:
 - Office location: convenient to home? Work?
 - Office hours: open evenings, weekends?
 - Coverage: Is there someone else available when your doctor is not? Who is providing that coverage? Are they also on the same insurance plan?
 - Affiliated Practitioners: Will I be seen by the doctor him/herself, or does the doctor use a Physician's Assistant or Nurse Practitioner? If so, what are his/her qualities and reputation? How independently does (s)he practice?
 - Hospital Admitting Privileges: Can this doctor admit me to a local hospital and continue to follow me as an inpatient? Does (s)he admit to a hospital that I would feel comfortable being admitted to?
 - Do I want one doctor for the whole family?: In this case, it would be better to choose a Family Medicine physician, especially if you have children or adolescents. (Be sure to inquire as to the scope of the doctor's practice, including whether they see children or adolescents.)