

Finding and Using Adult Health Care

As young people grow from childhood into adulthood, many will move from care by pediatricians into adult medicine. Moving to a different town due to school or a change of employment will also create a need to find a new doctor, especially if you happened to grow up with chronic health issues. So, how do you find a doctor who will meet your medical needs, that will be covered by your health plan, and who will give you the care you are looking for?

Before you start looking for a new doctor, think about what you want:

- Is where the office is located important? Will you need help with transportation? Do you need an office that is wheelchair accessible or do you need other special assistance in the doctor's office? Are office hours convenient? How do you contact the doctor at other times? What hospital do you want to use, and is this doctor on the staff there?
- Do you want someone who will take time with you during an office visit or are you comfortable being seen by someone who is "good" in his or her field but perhaps does not have the best bedside manner?
- Is it important that this new doctor is knowledgeable about your special health care needs or do you think you can provide that information or connect the new doctor with those who could provide medical insight?

Ways to look for a new doctor include:

- Ask your current doctor
- Check out the doctor your parents or other family members see
- Call a family support group or adult disability agency and check around
- Ask adults who have health needs similar to yours for recommendations
- Refer to your health insurance company booklet of approved providers
- Ask a Vocational Rehabilitation or Independent Living Center counselor
- Find a university health center (sometimes there are research studies going on which offer free care)
- Contact your local Medical Society, American Academy of Family Practitioners, or Internal Medicine Society either through the Yellow Pages or on their national websites

Since your wellness depends on the medical services you receive, it is important that you are comfortable talking with your new doctor and feel that he or she understands your concerns. Consider scheduling a "get-acquainted" interview

before you make a final choice of a new doctor. You will have to pay for this visit, as it is NOT covered by insurance benefits. An ideal time is about 15 to 30 minutes and should not waste your time or the doctor's. The best time to see a new physician is when your health condition is stable so you aren't asking for crisis care while seeing if you can develop a working relationship.

Think about (and write down) questions that are important to you:

- Is the doctor knowledgeable about your health issues and/or willing to learn from you and from previous doctors?
- Do you like the communication style with the doctor and in the office?
- Are you satisfied with office practices and access during an emergency or in urgent situations?
- Do you have access to hospitals and specialists if I need them?

Doctors who like to care for children are different from doctors who like to care for adults. For this reason, young adults seeking health care need certain skills:

- Ability and willingness to tell the doctor about your history, current symptoms, lifestyle, and self-care in just a few minutes (including carrying your own records and a summary of your medical history).
- Ability to ask questions about your condition and how it will affect your school, work, recreation, and social life.
- Ability to tell the doctor about your needs for education, technology, and accommodations and how your condition affects or might be affected by these.
- Willingness to follow medical recommendations that have been mutually developed by you and your doctor.
- More independence in following up with referrals and keeping all agencies informed.
- More involvement in keeping yourself well with diet and weight control, exercise and recreation, following medication, treatment and hygiene regimens, limiting risk-taking behaviors (such as drinking alcohol, smoking, taking non-prescription drugs, or unsafe sexual practices), and getting help when you feel angry, lonely or sad for long periods.
- Being more aware of your physical and mental symptoms and health needs before you have a serious medical crisis and knowing when to inform your doctor.
- Developing a plan for action for when you need emergency care: when to consult with the doctor, what hospital to report to, what care you want

and do not want, and naming someone who can let your wishes be known if you cannot (health care surrogate).

- Understanding how the health care benefits/insurance plan you have works for you: when to call for pre-approval, how to get reimbursements, what services are not covered, and how to file an appeal if you do not agree with decisions from the plan.
- Recognizing that as you become more capable in directing your care that you, not your parents, should make medical appointments, be the most knowledgeable about your health needs, know when to seek guidance in solving problems, and demonstrate that you are capable and competent and ready for adulthood!

*Source : KY Commission for Children with
Special Health Care Needs KY
TEACH Project
<http://chfs.ky.gov/ccshcn/ccshcntransition.htm>
Date: 2001*