



TIP SHEET: Finding a Primary Care Doctor

Q: Are you in need of a new Internal Medicine or Family Practice primary care doctor?

A: If so, it's most important to find one you can trust, with whom you can communicate well and establish a long-time relationship.

Q: What is a Primary Care doctor?

A: A primary care physician is a pediatrician, family practice, internal medicine or geriatric medicine doctor. This doctor is called a primary care physician because he or she will provide you, your child or your parent with the majority of medical care needed for their lifetime. Your primary care physician will work with you to determine if you require care from a specialist, such as a cardiologist or orthopedist.

Q: What training do Internal Medicine doctors receive and what care do they offer patients?

Answer:

- three years of training after medical school
- manage complex ailments and multiple medical needs
- treat most adults

Q: How do Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants work with the physicians?

A: Nurse Practitioners (NPs) and Physician Assistants (PAs) are licensed and complete at least bachelor degrees, plus additional graduate-level training, and each must pass a rigorous national exam before being licensed in the State of Florida.

The NP or ARNP is very well trained to care for the patient in a variety of ways:

- Sick and well visits
- Make diagnoses
- Perform physical exams and routine tests
- Administer immunizations and injections
- Administer medications
- Educate patients

A physician supervises PAs and NPs and the physician follows each patient's progress. Most patients find that working with a PA or NP, in concert with their primary care physician, offers them optimum care.

Q: What are some tips for finding the right Internal Medicine or Family Practice physician?

A: First, determine what is important to you. Make a list of things that matter the most when choosing a doctor. For example:

- Do you want a physician the treats all adults only or the whole family?
- Is location important to you?
- Do you need to choose a doctor based on your insurance requirements?
- Do you prefer a male or female physician?
- Do you require a doctor who speaks a certain language?
- Do you consider a doctor's age important when making your decision?
- Do you prefer an MD or a DO?
- Is it important the doctor be board certified?

Ask friends and relatives for recommendations. If you are moving and changing physicians, ask your current physician if he or she can refer you to someone in your new community.

Check with area hospitals. Many of them offer referral services.

Check with your county medical society. They will give you the names of several physicians.

Ask your insurance company, health maintenance organization or managed care plan if they have a panel of physicians from which you should select.