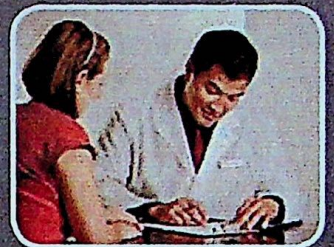


# Choosing the Right Health Care Provider:



*The three "R's" —  
Recommendations, Research, & Relationship*

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Washington Health Foundation

**F**inding the doctor that best fits your needs can seem overwhelming, but it is critically important to your health. Some people make the mistake of looking for the “perfect” health care provider. In reality, no provider can possibly meet the unique needs of every patient. Instead, look for the provider who is perfect for you. Use the three “R’s” below to assist in your search.

## Recommendations – Collect 5 Names

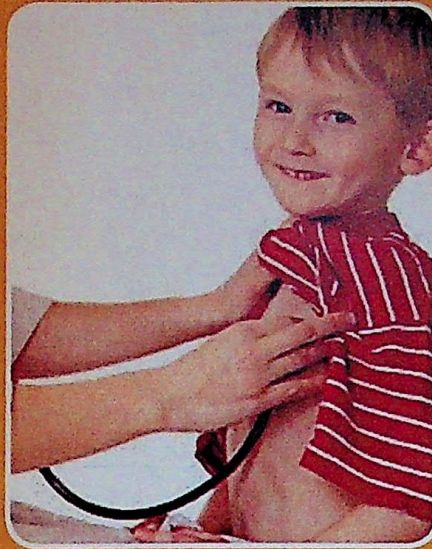
**Collect five names of health care providers who fit your general needs:**

- Type of provider (such as family practice, pediatrician, cardiologist, ARNP, etc.).
- Where the practice is located, check for accessibility by public transportation if applicable.
- Specific information important to you (such as gender, fluent in a specific language, etc.).

**Recommendations may be obtained from various sources such as:**

- Friends and family.
- By calling your local hospital or searching for providers on the hospital website.
- Searching online, credible websites include the Washington State Medical Association ([www.wsma.org](http://www.wsma.org)), [www.FindADoc.com](http://www.FindADoc.com) and [www.WebMd.com](http://www.WebMd.com).
- If you have health insurance, your plan likely has a phone number and/or online search function that will offer suggested providers based upon your general needs.
- If you do not have insurance, call your local community health center or hospital for recommendations of providers who offer no-fee or sliding-scale services—in King County, you can also call the Community Health Access Program (1-800-756-5437) or Within Reach outside of King County (1-800-322-2588) to be connected with providers or low-cost insurance.

**Note:** Ensure the five recommendations you receive are for providers covered by your insurance plan who are accepting new patients. You will need to call the providers’ offices directly to verify the answers to those questions.



## Research – Reduce to 3 Candidates

Research all five providers and select the three candidates whom you feel are the best qualified for your needs. No single criteria can determine the overall quality of care delivered by a health care provider. Your goal is to build an impression of the doctor's abilities based upon the overall picture you get from looking at multiple areas.

- Put the provider's full name and city in an Internet search engine, such as Google. You may get results for doctors with similar names so read beyond the first couple of pages of results to find relevant information. What kind of information surfaces? Positive or negative? Any newspaper articles? Is the provider affiliated with a teaching hospital?
- Check the provider's website, if there is one, or call the office to ask:
  - ✓ How long has he or she been in practice?
  - ✓ What hours does he or she see patients?
  - ✓ Is the address near public transportation, if needed?
- Some physicians take additional training and are recognized as "Board Certified"—the American Board of Medical Specialties can tell you if your provider has specialty certification ([www.abms.org/WC/NameAndLocationSearch.aspx](http://www.abms.org/WC/NameAndLocationSearch.aspx)).

**Note:** Many online sites rank providers, including some that require payment for reports. Be aware that many providers do not approve of these sites because of the subjective nature of many of the rating approaches.

## Relationship – Interview Candidates

The final step in choosing a health care provider is to have a discussion, preferably face-to-face. Call the provider's office and ask to set up a Provider Interview. This is your best opportunity to get a sense of the kind of relationship you would have as provider and patient—it will allow you a chance to learn how the provider responds to questions, and if he or she makes you feel comfortable. In some cases, you may have to pay a small fee for a face-to-face meeting so be sure to ask about this in advance.

The purpose of your interview is to determine which doctor is the best match for you. Feel free to ask any question that would help you decide among your final candidates. Some suggestions:

- Tell me why you became a doctor.
- What do you think you do best as a doctor? In what areas are you working to improve?
- What kind of experience do you have with \_\_\_\_\_? (List two or three of your existing health conditions or concerns).
- How do you feel about patients bringing you questions and information based on Internet research?
- Which of the local hospitals do you work with?
- What is the best way for me to get an urgent question answered? How about after hours? Who returns voicemail messages? Can I see you on the same day, if I thought I really needed to? Can we communicate by email?
- Who covers for you when you are away? Can you introduce me today when we are finished meeting?

### Ask yourself after the visit:

- Did I feel heard?
- How did I feel about the office? Was it clean? Was the staff friendly?
- Convenient parking or public transportation?
- What made me feel the most comfortable about this discussion? Least?
- Based on what I know right now, would I recommend this provider to someone else, if asked?

After all three interviews, reflect on your meetings and select the provider who you feel would be the best fit for you. Call the office and schedule an appointment for an initial visit and ask how to have your patient information/personal medical record transferred to your new provider's office.