

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR PHYSICIAN ON YOUR QUEST FOR TOTAL HEALTH

By Glenn D. Wollman, MD, FACEP

Standards of a good physician (and how to choose one)

Things change and things stay the same. From the beginning our species has enjoyed times of good health; plagued by illnesses and suffered physical injuries. Throughout time someone in the clan or tribe was there to administer healing with herbs, plants and poultices, and there is even evidence of surgical procedures being performed from pre-historic times.

Today the villages are bigger; the herbs and plants are in little capsules, some diseases have been eradicated and some new ones have emerged. We have many types of healers and physicians. We also have medical specialists that only treat specific organs, systems and diseases. As the world is becoming more integrated, so are the healing arts and sciences. In conjunction with Western, allopathic medicine, the partial list of healing modalities includes: Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurvedic, Shamanic, Naturopathy, Homeopathy, Osteopathy, Chiropractic, Energy Medicine, Touch and Movement therapies and Mind and Emotional therapies.

The good old-fashioned family doctor is approaching the status of the vinyl record. The needs and criteria for choosing a physician are different from the past. But again, some things remain unchanged. The morals, ethics, integrity, intelligence, honesty and compassion will always remain on the list of required qualities.

Now, in our "instant society" it is often more about access, fast and accurate service: "How quickly can I be seen and treated?" It may actually be unnecessary to ask these questions because in the modern era, people can go to urgent care centers, walk-in clinics and of course, Emergency Departments, all with a minimal amount of waiting and no need for appointments. Others are getting involved in "boutique medicine" where doctors are accepting a specific, limited number of patients willing to pay an upfront annual fee. This gives the patient access to their doctor (initially by phone) twenty-four hours a day.

The first decision to make in health and healing is to *be your own healer* and avoid unnecessary doctor visits. This means taking an active interest in your own body's wellbeing. Learn the basics about anatomy and body functions. Discover the benefits of proper nutrition, proper exercise, including stress and sleep management. Although these four topics seem obvious and have been discussed in many articles, new scientific information is constantly updating what we know and how we can benefit or be harmed by old beliefs. For example, certain foods high in omega 6 fatty acids can cause inflammatory responses and may lead to serious chronic illnesses such as degenerative arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease and possibly heart attacks. This is contrary to

what we were lead to believe before, that all omega fatty acids are good for our health. We need to keep up with the current information in health and healing.

There is now more evidence that exercise, stress reduction and improved sleep play extremely important roles in our health and our illnesses. I will cover these specific areas more fully in future articles.

Learn about first-aid and simple methods to prevent illness and injury and to promote healing. Along with this it is important to know the right time to make a decision to be seen by a physician. This decision is based on a combination of common sense, experience and the knowledge you have attained in anatomy, illness, injuries and first-aid.

Here are some suggestions for what to look for in a doctor for general purposes such as for yearly check-ups, occasional illnesses and or for a specific specialty:

1. Speak with friends that are happy with their doctor and find out why.
2. Make sure the doctor practices relatively close to where you live and holds admitting privileges at a hospital near you. In case you have to be hospitalized, you can be near home and family and also have the doctor that knows you best, taking care of you. This is also important when specialists they know and trust are required for your care.
3. You can research the doctor through the local medical or national associations, like the American Medical Association, and also through the state and national licensing boards. Do your research.
4. If you have an interest in alternative healing therapies in combination with western medicine, find out your potential doctor's opinion and willingness to work with other healers
5. Make sure that your doctor is willing to talk and explain things in a way that you understand. This will help you in making clear decisions
6. In choosing a specialist, especially for difficult diagnostic purposes and or for surgery, the skills of the doctor should take some precedence over the personality. If you have a chronic or recurrent medical issue, then it may be equally important to balance the skills and personality as part of the equation.
7. In this day and age, finances are an important part of the decision; make sure that your insurance covers your personal physician. Most insurance companies are helpful in providing lists of local practitioners and providers under their specific plans. If you choose not to carry health insurance, create a health care savings account. Have some kind of financial plan for your health care. If you live in a country where your health is covered through the government and you are happy there, remain in that country.
8. Something very rarely discussed in choosing a doctor is his/her comfort zone regarding "second opinions". Most doctors feel a second opinion is appropriate in complex cases, and may even suggest and encourage other medical opinions. On the

other hand, if you as a patient ask for a second opinion on every decision, ("Is it really broken?", "Do I really need this antibiotic?") then you may either want a different doctor or you need to examine your own issues.

9. If you are still having a problem choosing the right physician, call a **Medical Guide** for help. A Medical Guide is a Physician who is dedicated to working with you to make sure that you are getting the best medical care that is in harmony with your values and concerns. Especially in cases where there are conflicting medical opinions and recommendations, a Medical Guide can steer you to the appropriate care for you.

10. I would like to say a few words about choosing a non-allopathic healer. They should have a working knowledge of anatomy, physiology and clinical pathology in order to refer appropriately to an allopathic (western) physician in case of need. The morals, ethics, integrity, intelligence, honesty and compassion apply to this type of healer as well as the first nine points above.

Prescription for "total health"

A healthy body and sound mind are common goals for everyone. First let me focus on the physical body. At the most basic level we are all made of cells, and these cells usually operate to keep the body in a state of "ease". Through a balanced program of nutrition, exercise, stress management, sleep management, and spirituality we will tend to stay in the state of "ease". When our patterns of behavior lead us in the direction of bad diet, lack of exercise, poor sleep etc, our lives and cells go into a state of imbalance or "dis-ease".

In Western Medicine our main focus is in the physical plane and on the physical body, things that we can see, touch, measure and analyze. Diagnoses and treatments are based on a history, physical examination, laboratory tests and various forms of imaging (x-rays, special scans, ultrasound). Most of the other healing methods look at the "being" in relation to nature and the universe. The diagnoses and healings are focused on the energies flowing through "subtle" bodies, meridians and Chakras.

If you don't already have an awareness, understanding or belief in these concepts of energies, then may I suggest that you consider this a metaphor. For example, let us look at emotions. We have all had experiences with joy, happiness, sadness, anger and fear. We all can accept that they exist even though they can't be measured specifically. Emotions cause the nervous and endocrine systems to produce neurotransmitters and hormones that cause certain physiologic changes throughout the body. These changes may be desirable and life saving at the time but if they become chronic or inappropriate they cause harm and disease. New research is revealing connections between the neuro-endocrine system and the body's immune system. This will certainly change our priorities when it comes to stress and sleep.

It is easy to make a diagnosis of a gastric (stomach) cancer once it has presented itself in the physical form in the stomach. It can then be treated by surgery or sometimes it can be healed through various medications. The cancer does not just appear one day. It must start somewhere. Consider the possibility that long before it manifests in the

physical body; it begins with a disruption energetically in the body. Through repeated stresses and imbalances, cellular changes occur. A gene that normally prevents the growth of a cancer cell (tumor suppressor gene) may mutate, thereby allowing a cancer cell to grow unabated. This dis-ease eventually shows up in the physical body. Tune in to your emotions and other subtle energies and observe and correct the imbalances before they move out to the physical body.

This brings up the prescription for "total health". Actively choose to live a daily life style that includes balance between the physical body, the mind and emotional and spiritual energies. We need to follow healthy nutrition, exercise regularly, manage stress, get adequate sleep, and understand the power of good and bad patterns of behavior. Achieving this balanced lifestyle includes incorporating relaxation, meditation and balancing the subtle energies that are flowing in and around us.

This article appeared in Lapis Lazuli Light (2006)

About the author:

Glenn D. Wollman, MD practices as a Medical Guide assisting people in making medical decisions through an integrative, holistic approach. He also provides private consultation in life balance. Throughout his career, Dr. Wollman has effectively used a combined scientific and holistic method of treatment. He founded and was the Medical Director of a hospital-based Integrative Medicine Program at Saint Francis Medical Center in Santa Barbara, California. This Program was based on Harvard's Integrative Medicine Programs combining the best of western and eastern medical practices. He is a professor at the Santa Barbara College of Oriental Medicine where he teaches Cellular Pathophysiology and courses on bridging Eastern and Western Medicine. He is also the composer and a musical artist on the international selling healing musical CD, "Sleep Suite". He can be contacted through www.LivingSuite.net