



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# KNOW YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER



Once upon a time, a doctor with a black bag came to see you at home when you were ill. Things are quite different now. Many medical offices and hospitals have a wide range of professionals who care for you. Consumer Reports (March 2018) created a great summary of these roles.

Medical Doctor (M.D.) is a doctor who has attended 4 years of medical school, followed by an internship and residency. Board certification in a specialty requires additional training.

Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.) attended a school of osteopathy for the same number of years of training, including 200 hours of osteopathic manipulative medicine to treat musculoskeletal pain.

Primary care doctors are in short supply and both MD and DO's do not have much time to spend with patients. But they may be the best choice when you are faced with a complex health condition.

Nurse Practitioner (N.P.) One must first obtain an RN (undergraduate degree in nursing), and then go on for

a masters or doctorate degree with advanced education, clinical training and specialization. Nurses focus on patient-centered care, including health education and counseling, so they tend to take more time with patients. They are permitted to prescribe medications and tests.

Physicians Assistant (P.A.) is a three-year master's program including coursework and usually patient care experience. They can also prescribe medication and testing.

Registered Nurse (R.N.) usually indicates a bachelor's or associates degree in Nursing, or diploma from a nursing school. They focus on patient support and education, and are not able to prescribe.

It is very important to understand the competencies and challenges for each of these roles, especially as we make use of tele-medicine (phone or on-line consultations) and pharmacy-based clinics. As we age, we may want to look for a Board Certified Geriatrician, who specializes in the complex medical situations common in older adults, looking at the whole

person and coordinating care between specialists. They usually support a palliative approach to end-of-life care.

Above all, it is important to trust your care provider and feel that he/she listens to your concerns and includes you in decision-making. You can help by preparing 3 key questions and a medication list before your appointment. Make sure you understand the diagnosis, prognosis, your goals, and plan for care. Also review the summary for accuracy when you leave.

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