

How to Find A Good Doctor

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About.com Health's Disease and Condition content is reviewed by [Sanja Jelic, MD](#)

Are You and Your Doctor A Good Fit?

When you've been diagnosed with a severe condition or terminal illness, you will need to find a specialist to [get a second opinion](#) to confirm your diagnosis, and to get proper treatment.

Because your condition or illness will require long-term care, you will be spending many hours with this doctor. Therefore, the doctor you choose is very important. However, finding a doctor that's right for you can be difficult. Doctors, like the rest of us, have personalities. And, as we all know, personalities sometimes clash. To add to the mixture, not all doctors have a good "bedside manner". (Find out how to [get a second opinion](#) and [check a doctor's credentials](#).)

Most people get referrals from family or friends. Although this is sometimes effective, you must keep in mind that a doctor that's best for your brother, may not necessarily be best for you. However, if the referred doctor has the credentials you need for your treatment, put him on the list as a "possibility" along with any other doctors you have found with the same credentials. Then, follow the tips listed below to determine if the doctor is right for you.

- › Choose 3 or 4 doctors with the credentials you need for your treatment
- › [Verify the doctors' credentials](#)
- › Schedule appointments with those doctors whose credentials checked out

Assess the doctors and their staff by asking yourself the following questions:

- › When scheduling the appointment, is the receptionist friendly, prompt, and professional? Does she take the time to answer your questions? Were you left on hold for too long? Did she seem knowledgeable about the workings of the office?
- › When arriving for your appointment, were you greeted promptly? Was the reception area clean and comfortable? Was the staff friendly and willing to answer your questions?
- › When in the exam room, did you have to wait long to see the doctor? Was the exam room orderly and clean? Was there a chair for a family member to sit in?
- › When the doctor entered the exam room, did he introduce himself with a smile? Did he seem rushed or tired? Did he wash his hands before examining you? Did his conversation with you seem as though he looked at your file before greeting you? Did you get a good first impression? Did you feel comfortable talking with him and telling him personal information?
- › During the exam, did nurses pop in and out? Did the doctor have to leave the room during your exam? Did the doctor seem caring and compassionate, and sympathetic to your condition? Did the doctor rush through the exam? Did he seem relaxed? Did you feel as though you were the only patient he had to see that day?
- › After the exam, did the doctor talk to you about your concerns and ask you if you have questions? Did he seem knowledgeable about your illness, tests, current treatment options and medications? Did he discuss all of your treatment options with you? Did he immediately discredit any treatment options? Did he ask you if you were currently taking any medications?
- › When discussing testing and treatment options, was the doctor condescending when you asked for clarification of the information he was giving you? Did he seem cocky or egotistical or try to sound more knowledgeable than other doctors? Did he discuss any of his philosophies about treatment? Are they

unusual or against the norm? Did he ask for your opinions about treatment and treat you like a partner? If he disagreed with you, how did he address your disagreement?

- When discussing pain management, what were his philosophies? How does that correspond with your philosophies? Are you confident that the doctor will manage your pain to your expectations? Are you confident that he will be available in an emergency? Who fills in for him when he's on vacation or unavailable? Do you feel that you can trust his judgement enough to comply with his treatment?
- Other considerations. What hospital is he associated with? What is the reputation of that hospital? Is the doctor's office and the associated hospital close to your home?

Remember, you have responsibilities, too. You are part of your treatment team, so you must be forthcoming and honest about your feelings, philosophies, and opinions, and communicate them effectively with your doctor. Equally important, you must ask questions when you are unsure about something. Do not be shy or feel you are being "a pain" when you ask many questions. It is your doctor's responsibility to answer ALL of your questions. If he brushes you off or seems impatient with you, find another doctor.

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Get A Second Opinion From A Doctor Experienced in Your Type of Cancer

Remember, as a rule, you want a second opinion from a doctor who has had many years of experience in treating *your type of cancer*. The doctor should be connected with a large, well-equipped hospital known for serving cancer patients.

What is a "Multidisciplinary" Opinion?

A multidisciplinary opinion means getting together physicians from various specialties / disciplines, depending on the type of cancer, such as a pathologist, a diagnostic radiologist, a medical oncologist, a surgeon and a radiation oncologist. They can discuss the type of cancer, the location, the state, all the possible treatments and then recommend, in order, the preferred series of treatments most likely to successfully treat that particular patient.

What is Board Certification?

Specialists are doctors who have had four years of medical school and at least three years of supervised training in their specialty. Doctors receiving this training must pass a rigorous examination and meet specific standards to become certified by one of the organizations recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) and the American Medical Association.

How Do I Check the Credentials of Doctors?

In order to make sure that a doctor you're getting advice from is well-qualified, you need to find out the following:

- If the doctor trained at a cancer center / institute or a major teaching hospital
- If he or she is currently affiliated with such a facility
- If he or she is certified in medical oncology by the [American Board of Medical Specialties](#) and is a member of the [American Society of Clinical Oncology \(ASCO\)](#)
- How many years of experience the doctor has in treating your type of cancer

Where Do I Find Information About Doctors' Credentials?

You can learn what you need to know by asking the doctor directly or by checking any of the following resources:

- *The Official American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) Directory of Board Certified Medical Specialists* (which lists only board-certified physicians), by calling the ABMS Certification Verification Line at 1-866-ASK-ABMS, or by going to [abms.org](#)
- *American Medical Directory of the American Medical Association*
- Your state or county medical society can give you information on doctors in your area as well.

You should be able to find these books in the reference section of your local library.

Having difficulty finding a doctor's credentials? Did you get a second opinion and want to share your experience with others? Go to the [Lung Diseases Forum](#)

Sources: Cancer Research Institute, [blochcancer.org](#), and [Lung Cancer: Myths, Facts, Choices--and Hope](#)

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Second Opinions - Why It's Important to Get A Second Opinion

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A Second Opinion May Save Your Life

All too often, patients are diagnosed with a severe condition or terminal illness and do not get a second opinion. Yet, those same people will shop around for a car, house, even a college. Why spend so much time on a purchase, yet so little time on your health?

Second opinions can mean the difference between life and death. Imagine having a lung, breast, or prostate removed only to find out later that you were misdiagnosed. This is your life you are putting in the hands of others. So before getting treatment, get a second opinion! Not convinced yet? Read on.

Why Do I Need A Second Opinion?

Getting a second opinion allows you to not only confirm the diagnosis, but also to get a different perspective on your treatment options. Some doctors are more conservative and others more aggressive. There may be good arguments for several different options. By getting a second opinion, you get to hear *all* of your options.

It is also possible that another doctor might come up with a completely different and more promising option - one that your first doctor didn't think of, **or didn't know about**. No doctor can know *everything* or make the right decision *all the time*.

A second opinion can also serve as a quality check - to make sure you're really getting the most current and most effective treatment.

When Should I Get A Second Opinion?

There is no straight forward answer for when you need a second opinion. You should evaluate your situation to determine what is best for *you*. The information provided in this article addresses many of the common situations encountered by newly diagnosed patients. It will give you guidance for determining if you need a second opinion.

My Doctor Told Me There is No Beneficial Treatments For Me. So Why Should I Get A Second Opinion?

Many times patients are told there's no hope and that no further treatment exists that would be beneficial. So, what do you have to lose by getting a second opinion? Sometimes tumors deemed inoperable by one surgeon are found to be operable by another. Sometimes close examination of the case could change the diagnosis from one kind of cancer to another, more treatable type. Sometimes another doctor will know of a promising treatment that the first one didn't know about. All of these things have and continue to happen.

My Doctor Said My Cancer is "Borderline" and I Probably Don't Need Treatment At This Time, So Why Should I Get A Second Opinion?

If you're hearing words such as "almost", "possible", "probably", "maybe", "chances", "unlikely", etc., you should, most definitely, get a second opinion. For instance, if your doctor says, "Your tumor is *probably* inoperable, and the *chances* of removing all of the cancer are *unlikely*", get a second opinion. Or, more

obvious (and yes, it does happen) if your doctor suggests a treatment that just sounds "off the wall" to you, get a second opinion. For instance, if your doctor says "All the cancer in your bladder is gone, but I think we should remove your bladder anyway", get a second opinion. Conversely, if your doctor suggests "waiting" to see what happens, get a second opinion. Some cancers grow very fast. If you wait too long, you may find that it's now too late.

I Live In A Rural Area Where Expertise is Scarce. Should I Get A Second Opinion?

If you live in a rural area and get treatment at a small hospital, it may be beneficial to get a second opinion from a doctor at a major hospital. It's not to say that you can't get good treatment from a small rural hospital, but typically the doctor lives in the rural area, also, and may not be as tuned in to new treatments as doctors at a major, urban hospital.

Source: Cancerguide.org

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Why HMO Members Should Get Second Opinions

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Getting A Second Opinion Outside the Network May Save Your Life

Although [Health Maintenance Organizations \(HMOs\)](#) can and do offer fine care in many cases, there is a fundamental conflict of interest between an HMO and its members. The more money the HMO spends on you, the less it makes, so there is an incentive to give less expensive care, and an incentive not to refer outside the network. As a consequence, HMO members may not be told of clinical trials, or other promising new treatments. They may also be discouraged from trying expensive treatments that have only a small chance of success - even if that chance is real.

In addition, some HMOs actually prohibit their doctors from telling their patients about options that aren't available through the HMO. According to an article in *Oncology Times* (5/96 P22), "virtually all" HMOs have a "gag rule" in the contract between them and their doctors that discourages them from, "fully informing patients about options not included in their coverage." (*Gag Rule - a clause written into too many Physician contracts that force the Doctor to remain silent about methods of care that are not provided by your insurance policy, even when that other method would be better for you.*) The [American Medical Association](#) calls this practice "unethical" which it surely is. The contract between an HMO and its doctors is not a public document, so there's not even an easy way to tell if your HMO doctor is operating under a Gag Rule.

Given this, if you are an HMO patient, do not assume that you are getting the best treatment, or that you have been informed of all of your options. It is recommended that all HMO members have their treatment plan reviewed by an outside oncologist. You'll probably have to pay for the opinion yourself, but it's worth the expense. It is recommended that you get the opinion at a major cancer center or university hospital.

My Doctor Suggested I Participate In His Clinical Trial. Do I Need A Second Opinion?

If your doctor wants you to participate in a clinical trial that he is an investigator of, get a second opinion before signing up. One of the toughest things about running clinical trials is finding patients to participate. So the doctor may be putting *his* interests ahead of *yours*. Also, if you feel pressured or if your doctor seems to be coaxing you with "incentives" such as money, etc., get a second opinion. Another indicator that you need a second opinion is when your doctor makes comments about the "promise" of the clinical trial.

Source: [Cancerguide.org](#)

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