

# Celebrate Wellness!

## Finding the Right Doctor

Need a doctor? How can you be sure he or she is right for you and your family? Here are some facts and tips, courtesy of the Virginia Chiropractic Association.

Insurance coverage is a factor in many of our health care choices. If your preferred doctor doesn't participate in your insurance plan, do you have "out of network" (non-par) benefits that will still pay a portion of your care? Does the doctor have flexible financial policies for uninsured or underinsured patients? Don't be shy-- ask what your insurance covers, what it doesn't, and discover what your options are regardless of your coverage.

When insurance plans credential a doctor, they sift through basic data to ensure minimal competency. Likewise, regulatory bodies also help ensure your doctor's credentials. Medical doctors, chiropractors, and other health care professionals must graduate from accredited programs and then pass national board examinations before applying for licensure in the state(s) of their choice. Ensuring that a doctor is up to YOUR standards, and suits YOUR unique needs, is a matter that's beyond the purview of each state's licensing board. You deserve to know more than the basics. You might want to consider decisions about your health simply based on more than an insurance company's research or your state licensing board's decisions.

There are several hallmarks of good doctors. Some may be members of their state association, their national association, or both; but did you know that less than 50% of doctors are members of their state or national association? Though there are excellent medical doctors who are not members of the AMA or their state associations, and though some very talented chiropractors are neither members of their national or state association, membership in such associations is never a negative for the patient. You can check your doctor's membership status on the web.<sup>i</sup>

You can also research a doctor's history on the world wide web. Has their license ever been suspended or revoked? Has their licensing board taken any actions that you might have a right to know about? In Virginia, the Department of Health Professions lists such actions on the web.<sup>ii</sup> Though a good doctor may make an error in judgment, a pattern of such errors provides important information.

In addition to basic competency and a lack of numerous black marks, a doctor's profile is greatly bolstered by his or her history of patient care. How many years has the doctor been in practice? Does he have advanced certifications, fellowships, and/or diplomate status? How many patient visits has the doctor seen? How many cases like yours have they seen? What's their success rate? Has their expertise ever been formally recognized by their peers or regional publications? Do a little research, and perhaps surf the web a bit. You may learn some useful information that informs your decision.

The best way to find the doctor who's "right" for you and your family doesn't involve the web, or practitioner databases, or insurance companies. The best way is the old-fashioned way: Word of Mouth. The cream has a way of rising to the top, so ask around. Ask your health care providers who they'd see, if they were in your shoes. Ask your neighbors and co-workers. Ask fellow members of your clubs, social groups, or athletic associations. When the same name keeps popping up, you've found your doctor. At that point, all you need to do is schedule your first appointment to be sure that the "vibe" (bedside manner) suits your needs and unique personality.



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<sup>i</sup> AMA: <http://webapps.ama-assn.org/doctorfinder/html/patient.html>; ACA: <http://www.acatoday.org/search/memsearch.cfm>; ICA: <http://www.chiropractic.org/doctorfinder/>; MSV: <http://www.msv.org/custom/directory/?pageid=6135&showTitle=1>; VCA: <http://www.virginiachiropractic.org/members-public.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://secure01.virginiainteractive.org/dhp/cgi-bin/search\\_publicdb.cgi](https://secure01.virginiainteractive.org/dhp/cgi-bin/search_publicdb.cgi)