

In many parts of this country, especially rural areas, there are not enough doctors and health care facilities. Patients often have difficulty finding both primary care doctors and specialists for more serious illnesses. Many hospitals in these areas are closing important services or closing completely. Here are some tips for how to help you find good health care.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND ACCESS HIGH QUALITY HEALTH CARE

- **Do some research.** You can do online searches for primary care doctors, specialists and health care facilities in your area. You can also contact organizations that focus on specific diseases or conditions, such as cancer, heart disease or diabetes, to get information and help find specialists. Talking to other patients and caregivers about their experiences is another useful way to learn more about what is available and what kind of care they provide. This is important for finding specialist care which in some areas requires traveling to centers away from your home.
- **Know your insurance status, and who accepts what coverage.** Unfortunately, in this country access to health care often depends on your insurance coverage. Basic knowledge of what your plan covers and what doctors and facilities accept your coverage will help you find the care that you need. If you are uninsured, talk to community health centers and agencies in your area to help you either find a plan you can afford or locate clinical facilities that will provide treatment and care.
- **Build a trusting relationship with your doctor or provider.** Whenever possible, find a health care provider that you see on a regular basis, one who knows you and what matters to you. It is very important to be able to communicate openly and honestly with a doctor or provider who trusts and listens to you and who you trust.
- **Use Nurse Practitioners.** Nurse practitioners are a great resource. They often spend more time with patients, can be less expensive and provide a very high level of patient care. Nurse Practitioners are very important resources in areas that don't have enough primary care physicians.
- **Look for Community Health Centers.** These centers are often located in areas that lack other health care facilities. They offer primary care, prenatal care and referrals to specialists, based on a person's ability to pay. Some areas also have mobile health clinics that travel to different locations to offer primary care.
- **Use Telehealth, if it is available.** Many conditions don't actually require seeing a health practitioner in person. Telehealth can be an excellent way of managing simple health issues or following up on care you have already received. It is often less expensive, and you don't have to travel. If you don't have a computer or Wi-Fi access, you can use your phone to access telehealth services.
- **Prepare for your Appointment.** When you do see a doctor or other health care provider, you often have a short time to communicate your issues. That means using that time wisely. Before your appointment, think about or write down the most important issues you want to discuss. What questions do you want your doctor to answer? Set priorities and organize your thoughts about how to describe your symptoms, health care problems or concerns.



Find a provider you trust. Ask questions. Talk to other patients. Advocate for yourself and others.

- **Tell your provider if you cannot afford to pay for your care.** If your doctor recommends a medication or a treatment course that you cannot afford, it's important to communicate that up front. There are often ways to help you pay for the medicines or less expensive options.
- **Improve your self-advocacy skills.** You can become a better advocate for yourself by learning how to communicate more effectively with your health care providers. You can learn skills and ways of navigating our health care system, finding the resources you need, making sure your voice is heard, and you are a true partner in your health care.
- **Advocate for others, and for change.** Your experience and knowledge can be valuable to others who are facing serious illnesses, or to improving health care in your community. By reaching out and advocating for others, or for health system change, you can make a real difference and help yourself.



This tip sheet was developed in collaboration with PAF and the Fannie Lou Hamer Cancer Foundation, with support from the Danaher Foundation, to promote patient education and empowerment.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Cancer Foundation is committed to preventing cancer and suffering from cancer by: 1) Increasing awareness of cancer risk factors; 2) Enhancing the quality of life of those affected by cancer; and, 3) Establishing a public agenda for the prevention, detection, treatment and cure of cancer in Mississippi, particularly among residents of the Mississippi Delta, and underserved populations in other locations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Health Insurance Benefits Resources
- Health Insurance Communication Strategies
- Additional Self Advocacy Resources



Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF) is a national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that assists patients with chronic or severe illnesses in accessing high-quality, affordable, equitable health care. PAF provides in-depth case management, financial and social needs navigation, patient education, and direct financial aid for eligible patients. PAF works to ensure a more equitable healthcare system and to bring patient voices to the center of treatment and care.