

Why is it important for me to establish a relationship with a doctor?



RESOURCE ROADMAP | FOR COVERED MEMBERS OF THE MCUL TRUST

A Primary Care Physician (PCP) fills an important role in a person's health, like the way a home room teacher in school serves as an anchor for students. A PCP is your main health care provider in nonemergency situations. Your PCP typically provides you with medical care over a long period of time, helping you stay healthy, manage your care and recommend specialists when needed. Research has shown that people who live in states that have more PCPs have better health outcomes, including fewer deaths from cancer, heart disease, or stroke.

The benefits of having a PCP include:

Continuity of care. When a doctor is a PCP, he or she is "responsible for providing a patient's comprehensive care," according to the American Academy of Family Physicians. Routine checkups with the same doctor builds a relationship beneficial to the patient. Over time, the PCP develops a comprehensive snapshot of the patient's health which helps diagnose illnesses more accurately. A PCP also collaborates with other doctors and healthcare professionals, to keep track of any specialty care a patient receives.

Medication management. About 35 percent of Americans take at least one prescription drug. Of those who use prescription medication, they take four on average, according to research by Consumer Reports. Because different medications are often prescribed by different doctors, there's always a chance of side effects when the drugs interact with each other. A PCP can serve as gatekeeper by keeping track of all medications a patient takes, noting any changes in dosages or frequency that could cause negative side effects. Many electronic medical record systems used in physician offices these days will automatically flag medication contraindications, prompting the doctor to review with the patient any side effects he or she may be having. The

PCP can then recommend changes to the medications or consult with the prescribing doctors to better manage the patient's medication regimen.

Time savings. When a patient has an established relationship with a primary care doctor, issues that come up in between annual checkups can often be addressed quickly.

Prevention. The more a doctor is aware of your overall health, the more likely they will be able to identify health problems before they happen. Having your overall health profile enables the PCP to recommend tests that can determine your risk of developing certain diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. If you're at high risk, your primary care doctor can recommend lifestyle changes you may need to make to help lower that risk and prevent becoming sick.

Behavioral health. Comprehensive care under the scope of a PCP includes monitoring a patient's behavioral health. The current recommendation is to screen adults and children age 12 and up for depression at primary care office visits. Psychologists, psychiatrists, or other behavioral health professionals who see that patient will then have the opportunity to communicate with his or her PCP and assigned social worker throughout treatment. Treatment may include medication for depression, anxiety or another condition and often behavioral health counseling. The social worker assigned to the patient contacts him or her regularly to see how they're feeling and help connect them with any other services they may need.

To find a in-network PCP near you visit your HealthJoy app or www.fchn.com.



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