

YOU AND YOUR DOCTOR

PART I: CHOOSING YOUR DOCTOR

Choosing your physician is one of the most important decisions you will make. There are many factors that go into making this decision:

- Physician training, expertise and competence
- Personal preferences such as gender, age, language spoken, location of office and hospital affiliation
- Health insurance restrictions

In order to learn about a doctor's background, you can call her office and inquire about her education and training. You can also check with the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine – call (617) 727-3086 then press #2 or go on the Internet to www.massmedboard.org to obtain license status and board certification(s) of the physician.

There are different types of doctors who care for seniors: internists, family physicians and geriatricians. An internist sees only adults. A family physician sees all family members, regardless of age. A geriatrician is either an internist or family practitioner who has 1-2 years additional training in the medical, social and psychological issues of older adults.

To find a physician, you can ask relatives, friends or other health professionals for recommendations. If you belong to a managed care plan (HMO) you should request a list of doctors from their membership services office (their telephone number is often on the back of your health insurance card). You can also contact the Massachusetts Medical Society for names of physicians in your area – (781) 893-4610. Once you have chosen a physician, call the office to set up a new patient appointment – these tend to be longer appointments and must be made well in advance.

Next month we will discuss preparing for your doctor's visit. Part II: Talking with Your Doctor.