

Finding a primary care physician is an important step for millennials

June 13 2016, by Adam Pope

WHAT DO I LOOK FOR IN A PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN?



Find someone who is available and with whom you **feel comfortable**

Check their profile for where they trained and whether they are **board certified**

Are office hours **a fit for your schedule?**

Talk to someone with **experience as a patient** there

What kind of coverage is **available from a partner or associate** if your physician is out?

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Knowledge that will change your world

Credit: University of Alabama at Birmingham

According to a recent survey by FAIR Health, a nonprofit organization that gathers information on health data, more than 50 percent of millennials use means such as retail clinics, urgent care centers or emergency rooms for nonemergency medical care.

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine Associate Dean of Rural and Primary Care William Curry, M.D., says convenience is the main factor.

"Those care providers are convenient, and often they provide exactly the care someone needs," Curry said. "It's important to realize they cannot take the place of a [primary care](#) provider for the screening, prevention and long-term follow-up that we all need, customized to each of us."

Curry says that generally healthy and busy younger people of every generation typically assume everything was fine as long as they felt good, but screening and preventive services have proved to be worthwhile at every age. He says millennials may have additional barriers to hearing and believing primary care is important.

"For one thing, medicine has oversold and misdirected some efforts, making skepticism understandable," Curry said. "We have 'medicalized' so much that the volume of recommendations and warnings can lead to information overload and alarm fatigue."

Millennials typically turn to Google and WebMD before visiting actual doctors, whom they are less likely to visit repeatedly or regularly.

"Millennials have grown up with the internet and great digital tools that

bring libraries and opinions to their fingertips," he said. "I see them sometimes assuming all that information is equally reliable when it is not."

Curry says millennials sometimes believe they can find simpler, less demanding alternatives through the internet and a dietary regimen or natural remedy.

"These may be helpful or not, but they unfortunately can't take the place of medical screening and prevention that has been proved effective," he said. "The short solution is to have a healthy skepticism but to accept good evidence of value."

Curry also believes a lack of primary care physicians is another reason millennials are less likely to seek one out.

"The shortages of primary care physicians are bad enough just from the lack of supply and the growth of the population," Curry said. "With more people having insurance, demand for [primary care services](#) increases."

He says Alabama has been more accommodating to shortages of [primary care physicians](#) for a much longer time compared to states like Massachusetts.

Curry says there are many advantages for millennials to find a primary care physician. He says seeing someone who knows you and has a baseline record is quicker—and there is less chance that something will be overlooked.

Curry says relationships matter, and patients are more likely to get the correct diagnoses and treatments if they have a primary care provider.

For those with a personal history of a chronic health problem or of a family history of problems that often are inherited, such as diabetes, [high blood pressure](#), heart disease, stroke, high cholesterol, [chronic lung disease](#), or others, it is especially important to have a primary care physician, regardless of age.

Everyone should be screened for certain disorders, many of which can be present without symptoms for years. Women should get cervical cancer screenings and vaccinations. If all is well, repeat checks can be as infrequent as every three to five years for people under the age of 30. These approaches can prevent avoidable complications such as heart attack, stroke, kidney failure or vision loss.

"Unfortunately, if people wait for symptoms, a lot of damage will have occurred," Curry said.

What do I look for?

Curry says it is important to research when it comes to looking for a primary care physician.

"Find someone who is available and with whom you feel comfortable," he said. "Check their profile for where they trained and whether they are board-certified. Do they have an internet patient portal to make communication easy for test results or questions? Are office hours a fit for your schedule? What kind of coverage is available from a partner or associate if your physician is out? Do they have nurse practitioners or physician assistants in the practice to improve access?"

He says, if possible, talk to someone with experience as a patient there, or check online comments or ratings; but keep in mind these ratings may not be entirely reliable.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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