

Primary Care vs. Specialist Care: Why both are important

An information sheet on transitioning to adult-based care

Your overall health is important. One way that you look after your overall health is by having the right people involved in your health care. Having regular visits with your family physician (i.e. primary care provider) are key to keeping you healthy. It is especially important during transition that you continue to have regular visits with your family physician. They are a lifelong resource that will help you to navigate and see the right specialists in adult-based care.

What is Primary Care?

Primary Care is the ongoing point of contact that you have with the health system that supports day-to-day health care needs throughout every stage of life.

Examples of primary care and professionals that work within primary care include:

- Visiting a family doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Discussing a prescription with a pharmacist.
- In Nova Scotia, speaking with an 811 registered nurse.
- An appointment with a physiotherapist.

The primary care provider that you may be most familiar with is your family physician.

Your primary care family physician understands the 'big picture' of your health and takes care and coordinates any kind of health care services that you may need.

Why is Primary Care important?

Having a regular primary care team that knows you and your health condition is very beneficial. For example, a regular family physician can get to know you, help you feel comfortable and talk to you more openly. They will also be able to develop a clear understanding of your health needs and therefore help guide you in your decision-making.

It is also beneficial to have someone who is up to date so that you don't need to constantly repeat your health history.

Gaining access to specialist care requires that you have a family physician to make that referral for you.

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Choosing the Right Family Physician

It is important to choose the right family physician for your needs. Make sure you:

- Feel comfortable with them.
- Are able to freely express yourself and what you need.
- Are able to share your personal information.
- Are able to ask him/her the hard questions.
- Feel like you’re being listened to.
- Understand the information they give you.

What is specialist care?

A specialist is a physician who, as the name implies, specializes in a particular area of medicine like Dermatology, Endocrinology, Rheumatology or Cardiology.

A specialist is considered someone who has advanced training in one aspect of a person’s care, one organ system, one problem area or one type of intervention.

It is important to know that the only way to access specialist care is through your family physician.

Resources:

If you need help finding a family physician or other primary care provider in your community, please visit:

Nova Scotia: <http://novascotia.ca/dhw/physicians>

New Brunswick: <http://www.gnb.ca/patientconnectNB>

PEI: <http://www.healthpei.ca/patientregistry>

For non-emergency health information and services in all three Maritime Provinces, call 811. When you call 811, a registered nurse will give you advice and information that you may need relating to your health.

Why is Specialist Care Important?

Having a specialist who is an expert in your health condition is essential to help you stay healthy. Specialists are involved in diagnosis, disease prevention, treatment and follow-up care.

The care the specialist provides may include:

- Investigating new ways to help manage your condition.
- Looking at complex care related to your condition.
- Offering guidance and recommendations to your family physician/primary care team for ongoing treatment, (for example: medications, monitoring and general care).

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