

CHOOSING DOCTORS OR HEALTH SYSTEMS

How to Switch to the Best Fit for Your Needs

Choosing doctors or health systems can feel like a touchy subject. But it shouldn't be.

Finding the right doctor or health system can make a big difference in your care. And it's easier than you may expect to make the decision that's right for your health, your pocketbook and your peace of mind.

Making It Happen: Questions and Answers

Why switch?

You may have one of these three reasons for switching doctors or hospitals:

- » **Personal.** You may want a doctor or doctor's office with an approach or style that is a better "fit."
- » **Financial.** Choosing a different doctor or facility can have a big impact – sometimes thousands of dollars – on your out-of-pocket costs.
- » **Quality.** Doctors, hospitals or health systems are all different. A hospital that has high quality in one service may struggle in another, for example. Programs like **QualityPath** offer more information.

How do I find a new doctor or facility?

Start by comparing your options on Find a Doctor. Find a Doctor helps you search The Alliance network in Wisconsin, northern Illinois or eastern Iowa for more than 7,000 medical doctors and 13,500 professional service providers.

Go to www.the-alliance.org and click Find a Doctor to get started. Register and log in to compare cost information for more than 70 procedures.

Find a Doctor also has quality information about primary care locations, birthing centers, hospital safety, **QualityPath** providers and more.



What's my next step?

Next, you should schedule your first appointment with the new doctor. You'll probably be asked to sign a release form so your new doctor can obtain your health records. You may be asked to do this before you arrive or it may occur at your first appointment. If your health records are shared electronically, there's usually no cost to you.

Will switching hurt my existing doctor's feelings or make the doctor mad at me?

People switch doctors all the time – when they move, when they change jobs or when they select a new health plan, for example. In most cases, you can make the switch without talking with your doctor.

If you want or need to have a conversation about the switch, remember that your doctor is a professional who wants what's best for you. That means he or she should be able to understand why you are making a switch without getting upset.



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What do I say if the doctor asks why I'm switching?

If your doctor asks why you are switching, it's OK to be honest. Here are phrases that can help:

- » "I appreciate your care, but I need a doctor who is a better fit for my needs."
- » "I appreciate your care, but your office hours (or location or services) are not a good fit for my needs."
- » "I need to stay within my health plan."
- » "I want to use a **QualityPath** doctor (or hospital)."
- » "My health plan helps me save money if I choose a different doctor (or hospital)."

Remember, choosing the doctor who is the best fit for your needs is your decision.

I want to see a specialist in a different health system than my primary care doctor. Does the doctor have to make the referral?

You can usually call the specialist yourself, but check with your health plan to make sure you follow the plan's rules. If you're part of the **QualityPath** program, please call the Patient Experience Manager at 800.223.4139 for help in making the switch. Check the Find a Doctor directory to make sure the specialist is in-network.

Can I take my medical records with me?

Yes. Your access to your medical records is protected by a federal law, the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Your new doctor's office location or health system can usually help you transfer records. Many doctors' offices and facilities use electronic medical record systems that allow them to share records at no cost to you.

Signing a "release of information" form authorizes the new clinic to get your medical records. There may be a fee for some types of information or medical images. If you're part of the **QualityPath** program, call the Patient Experience Manager at 800.223.4139 for assistance.

Can I do anything else to prepare?

Make a list of any medications you take. Next, list any major events in your medical history.

That list might include:

- » Hospital stays as an inpatient for a surgery, accident or illness
- » Outpatient surgeries or procedures
- » Chronic conditions, such as diabetes, asthma or heart disease
- » Other major health events

Bring this information to your first appointment with your new doctor. This information may already be part of your electronic medical record at your previous doctor or health system. It can be helpful to print a copy to bring to your first appointment.

Learn more

- » "Five Questions to Ask Your Doctor Before You Get Any Test Treatment, or Procedure" from Choosing Wisely.
<http://consumerhealthchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/CWPosterGeneralSmall.pdf>
- » "When It's Time to Fire Your Doctor," written by a doctor for Consumer Reports on Health
<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2012/04/when-it-s-time-to-fire-your-doctor/index.htm>