



Good decision making and communication key in choosing the right doctor

By **NANCY SUNDSTROM**
Special to the Record-Eagle

For many, choosing the right doctor can be just as important a decision as buying a house or car, helping a child select a college, or any number of other issues one deals with that have a long-term impact on the quality of life.

In years past, it was often the case that a doctor took the lead and the patient followed, but that relationship has evolved over time to become more of a partnership, where the patient is now more proactive about personal health and the doctor works closely with them with a focus on prevention and health maintenance.

To develop that type of relationship requires effective communication, with time and effort on both sides. And in order for that to happen, a patient needs to feel they've chosen a physician with whom that is possible.

What are some of the main issues to consider when selecting a doctor? ■ Certainly, logistics play a role. Determining the importance of location of a doctor's office, office policies and the general availability of the doctor (i.e. how far in advance appointments need to be made).

■ Which hospitals the doctors practice in, whether it is a single doctor or a group practice.

■ If they're covered by Medicare or your insurance plan.

■ Perhaps most importantly, what the doctor's area of specialty is and if they are board-certified and if so, in what field.

That last point is stressed by Connie Davenport, is a Traverse City-based R.N., B.S.N. who has worked in health services since graduating in 1983. She is also married to a physician, Dr. Mark Davenport, and is currently a staff nurse at the Student Health Service Clinic at Northwestern Michigan College.

"I think it's become increasingly important to look not only at a physician's area of specialty when you're looking into doctors, but also whether they're board certified in their specialty," said Davenport. "That board certification means that they have valuable additional training and are required to update that training regularly in order

to be certified. As medical consumers, we've gotten to the point where we do work with more specialists."

"For example, a woman of baby boomer age in a typical household might use the services of five, six, or even more doctors for herself and her household," she continued. "That list might include orthodontists, pediatricians, internists, gynecologists, obstetricians, and that's just for starters. If you're going to get that specific, the first suggestion I make is to look into the aspect of board certification."

In the case of a doctor who is a board-certified family practitioner, that person not only has completed their residency, they've also taken another major exam in that field from which they receive their certification. That is then required to be updated, along with the doctor undertaking a substantial amount of continuing education credits on a regular basis.

Davenport added that another important consideration when you involve a number of doctors in your health care is that it the responsibility for coordinating practices and communication largely falls to the patient, who is the single person in the equation who knows what is happening on all fronts.

"The trend is to work with a growing number of doctors who deal with specific issues and while that's not always necessary, it does happen, so the patient needs to stay on top of what is happening in terms of

their own health care and make sure that different doctors have the information they need to help you as best they can," she said. "When lines do get crossed, it's not necessarily a function of mismanagement by doctors, but one that has more to do with time and management of information. That's part of why people are becoming more proactive about their health issues."

Lori Wells, director of the Traverse City Senior Center, works on a daily basis with a segment of the local population for whom choosing and working with doctors is an issue of paramount importance.

She said that while the majority of seniors she knows have relationships

with doctors as opposed to needing to find new ones, coordination is a task of major concern, as is dealing with specialists.

"In our area and across the country, coming to grips with the expanding list of medical issues that are specific to seniors is something we're all trying to get a handle on," she said. "And what that list is comprised of is constantly changing. As time goes on, it may become more important for doctors to make house calls because transportation is a huge problem everywhere. Areas of specialty is another one, as is the coordination of care."

If you are getting started with a new doctor, you may want to keep the following in mind:

■ Learn the basics of how the office runs.

■ Share your medical and medications history with your doctor, along with relevant information about personal habits and family life.

■ Be prepared for your appointments, bringing a list of concerns and a family member or friend, if needed.

■ Whoever your physician is, plan to update them, be honest, stick to the point, ask questions and share your point of view.

Good decision making will be at the start of a new relationship with a doctor — good communication will keep it going.

Nancy Sundstrom is a local freelance writer.

Yoga for Health
— EDUCATION —
Center for Conscious Living
Libby and Michael Robold,
Directors

YOGA CLASSES
Workshops, Retreats
& Therapy

Yoga is a comprehensive wellness program for health of body, mind and soul.

REGISTER NOW for:
Five & Ten Week Yoga Sessions
January 13-March 22
Women's Health Issues
Seminar January 26

Yoga for Health Education
Located in Traverse City's Most
Tranquil Setting
Building 50 on the Old State Hospital Grounds
1200 West 11th St, Suite 106
231-922-YOGA (9642)

Water Workouts



***Mon., Tues., Wed., Fri.**
9:00 a.m. to 9:50 a.m.

Mon., Tues., Thurs.
11:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.



***Mon., Wed., Fri.**
8:00 p.m. to 8:50 p.m.

***9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.**
classes are more intense
\$5.00 per class or 10 for \$45.00

Administrative Office
231-922-4818
Pool Office
231-922-4814

Grand Traverse Parks & Recreation Department
1213 W. Civic Center Drive
Traverse City, MI

POLAR
heart rate monitors



FROZEN FOOT RACE
JAN. 18th

BIGFOOT SNOWSHOE RACE
JAN. 25th

Get Fit • Exercise Right
Call 933-9242 for more race info

RUNNING FIT

3301 W. South Airport Rd.
Across from the Grand Traverse Mall
(231) 933-9242

"Your Walking - Running - Fitness - Snowshoe Store"