

## Doctor's Bag



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### CHANGING DOCTORS IS A DECISION YOU SHOULDN'T TAKE LIGHTLY

That's why it's important to communicate with both your current doctor and the new one.

If you are making the switch because of an issue with your current doctor, it might be hard to express your feelings. On the other hand, this is information that could be very helpful to both the doctor and future patients. Whether you choose to communicate face-to-face or in writing, be clear, respectful and polite. Give the doctor a chance to respond – it may not change your mind but you might find out that the problem is a misunderstanding or one that is easily solved.

Unless you need to make the change because of treatment issues for a specific condition, get to know your new doctor before you are sick or injured. Many doctors will allow you to come in for an initial consultation without charging for the appointment. Or use the opportunity to schedule an appointment for routine preventive care. In any case, it is important to establish a working relationship with your new doctor, and the best time to do that is not during a medical emergency.

Changing doctors is a difficult decision for many people. HealthLink's web site, [www.healthlink.com](http://www.healthlink.com), includes a section called "Enrollee Rights and Responsibilities" that describes the fundamentals of the doctor/patient relationship. Check it out if you have questions or concerns.

## HLInfo YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

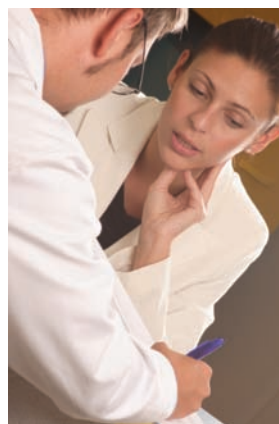
### NEED TO CHANGE DOCTORS?

There are two aspects to changing doctors and both include some very important steps – 1) leaving your current doctor; and 2) finding and seeing the new one.

#### Leaving Your Current Doctor

Before you make the switch, you should take the following steps:

- Make sure you have chosen a new doctor and that he or she is accepting new patients.
- Schedule one final visit with your current doctor to get an overall status report on your health. This may also be a good time to discuss your reasons for leaving. Be candid, but keep the conversation respectful and polite.
- Ask for copies of your medical records from the past five years. They will provide important background information for the new doctor. (Most states have laws that give you the right to your medical records. Your current doctor may ask for the request in writing and there may be a fee for the copies.)



#### Finding and Seeing Your New Doctor

Once you've had your final visit and have obtained your medical records, it's time to make the switch. Here are some guidelines:

- Schedule an initial appointment to build a relationship with the new doctor. This is an excellent time to get a routine physical if you're due – or schedule a consultation to go over your records and introduce yourself. Don't wait until you are sick or hurt to meet your doctor for the first time.
- Make copies of your medical records so that you can keep one set at home. If possible, send the other set to the new doctor prior to your first appointment.
- Prepare a list of questions ahead of your first appointment so you don't forget to discuss anything important. You can tell the new doctor why you switched if you wish. The reasons for switching from your old doctor can be a good indication of what you expect from the new one.

#### Building a Doctor/Patient Relationship

The best way to receive the medical care you need is to build and maintain a close relationship with your doctor. Two-way communication is essential. Ask questions if you don't understand what your doctor is telling you. Follow doctor's orders, take medicines as prescribed and follow-up as recommended. You may also visit WebMD's web site at [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com) for suggestions in developing your patient-doctor relationship.

## DidUKnow?

There are many valid reasons a person might consider changing doctors. Here are some examples:

- You are moving to a new home and the doctor's office is too far away from the new address.
- Your doctor no longer participates in your health plan.
- Your doctor retired or has closed his or her practice.
- The doctor's office moved to a location that is inconvenient.
- You have a medical condition that requires a second opinion and you wish to see a specialist other than the one your doctor recommended. (This isn't necessarily changing doctors but you will need to communicate with your current doctor and make sure the specialist receives your medical records. Typically, your doctor will respect your decision to see a different specialist and will be happy to handle the transfer of your information.)
- You feel you could get better care elsewhere. If you do not think your doctor is providing appropriate medical care, at least, schedule an appointment with another doctor for a second opinion.
- You are uncomfortable with your doctor/patient relationship. As a patient, you have the right to be treated with consideration and respect, to receive complete and understandable information, and to be a participant in decision-making regarding your care. You also have the responsibility to let your doctor know when you have concerns about issues regarding your relationship.

#### Newsletter Information Sources

About.com, Patient Empowerment, *How to Change Doctors* by Trisha Torrey, February 11, 2008; *Is It Time to Change Doctors* by Trisha Torrey, February 21, 2008