



# A TIP SHEET FOR CHOOSING & WORKING WITH DOCTORS

Region 4 Genetics Collaborative

## **Clinical Skills & Knowledge**

Does the doctor have training and/or specialty interests important to your child's needs? *Selecting a doctor with an interest in children's special needs is a benefit.*

## **Experience**

Has the doctor cared for other children who have a similar diagnosis as your child or for children with developmental delays or disabilities in general? *Experience can help your doctor to be more aware of resources and services that might benefit your child and your family.*

## **Mutual Respect and Sense of Connection**

Is the doctor approachable? Do they make you feel comfortable? *Choosing a doctor may mean finding a balance between technical skills, interpersonal skills and experience. It's up to you to decide what you and your child need right now and you may find that what you need changes over time.*

## **Be a Partner**

Decide what type of partnership you want with your child's doctor. How do you want him or her to be involved in coordinating care and services for your child? What role do you want in making decisions? *Whatever type of partnership you have, you should feel comfortable asking questions, sharing your insights, and feeling like you and the doctor are part of a team. In turn, you should be open to the doctor's questions and insights as part of your child's team.*

## **Be a Role Model**

Show by example how you want to be treated and how you want your child to be treated. *If you want the doctor to listen to you, be a good listener, too. Talk about the good things as well as your concerns. Share pictures and stories so he or she can appreciate and get to know your child.*

## **Be Understanding**

Doctors often must have appointments back-to-back, every 15 minutes or even sooner. *If it seems that the doctor is in a hurry to move on to the next appointment, you are probably right! If you need more time, let him or her know and maybe they would be willing to work it out.*

## **Don't Expect Perfection**

**Texas Parent to Parent**

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Every relationship has rough times. Be willing to be flexible, if needed. *Recognize that doctors are human too, and give them the chance to make things better. If you are mostly pleased with your child's doctor, then it may be worth working through rough times.*

### **Express Gratitude**

Say thank you, in person or in writing. *Let your doctor know what is helpful and when he or she is doing a good job.*

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CHOOSING A DOCTOR**

1. Does this office regularly see children with *(specify your child's condition)*?
2. If no, ask: Do staff members have experience with children with genetic conditions?
3. What types of services does your office offer? Which are provided by physician and which by a physician's assistant or nurse?
4. What approach does the office take when multiple professionals are involved in the care of my child? *Example: Is there a team approach to care when other doctors, physical therapists, teachers or home care nurses are involved?*
5. Does your office have a care coordinator available? Or, is the doctor comfortable being my child's medical care coordinator?
6. How many patients does your office see each day? How long does an average appointment take? How long does an expanded appointment take?
7. Which hospital(s) do you have admitting privileges to?
8. What is your telephone call policy? Do you give advice or refill medications over the phone? Are there ever situations when I should call the doctor at home?
9. Does your office communicate or respond to questions through email?
10. Who will my child see after hours or when the doctor is on vacation?
11. Does the office accept (name of your insurance, Medicaid, etc.) for payment of services? Does the office bill my insurance company directly?
12. What is the average cost of an office visit? If the office charges are above what my insurance considers to be "reasonable" are you able to waive the remainder of the balance?
13. Where are tests and lab work done?
14. Is the doctor comfortable discussing alternative treatment such as the use of homeopathic treatment?

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15. Does the doctor allow a parent to make an appointment specifically to ask questions and discuss a plan of care?
16. How would the doctor feel if I ever asked for a second opinion?
17. Does the office have a specialist referral list available?
18. Other Questions?

### **DECIDING TO CHANGE DOCTORS**

**Remember: Trust your own judgment and view yourself as an expert on your child**

*Parents are often pleased with their child's doctor, but sometimes things just don't feel right and your desire to be part of a medical home is not getting through to your doctor. Here are some questions to ask yourself if you are feeling uncertain about the quality of care your child is experiencing.*

1. Does the way the office is run work for you?
2. Is the doctor available when you need him or her?
3. Are you often confused about recommendations and why certain treatments are prescribed?
4. Do you feel like your concerns are not taken seriously?

If these questions make you doubt your instincts or your doctor's...trust your gut. If the relationship doesn't feel right and you haven't been able to make it better, and then know that it is time to consider changing doctors.

#### Parent-to-Parent Tip

Try a positive approach through phone call or written note. Example: "Thank you for all you have done for my child. We really appreciate the time you have spent with us. But right now this is not the perfect fit for our family – I would like my child to see someone else."

For the full version of Partnering with your Doctor, *The Medical Home Approach*, A guide for families with children who have genetic conditions, go to:

[http://region4genetics.org/information\\_pages/Region\\_4\\_Medical\\_Home\\_Guide.pdf](http://region4genetics.org/information_pages/Region_4_Medical_Home_Guide.pdf)

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