Who's who in your healthcare team

Summary

- Many people have a team of people who they call on to meet their healthcare needs, starting with their general practitioner (GP), dentist and pharmacist.
- Your healthcare providers should work together as a team, all contributing to your healthcare.
- It is important to share information with all your healthcare team members, particularly about medication, therapies and other treatments.
- Your GP is a good person to help you keep track of all your healthcare needs.

Your general practitioner is the main medical professional you are likely to see for your healthcare. They can point you in the direction of preventative healthcare, specialist care, allied health and complementary medicine options, and provide you with referrals to specialist services if and when you need them.

You may see a range of health professionals over the years. Keeping a record of health appointments and medication, and sharing information with them is important to make sure you get the best, most informed healthcare service possible.

Your primary healthcare team

Your general practitioner is your first point of call for general health issues or problems, such as illnesses or injuries that cannot be treated by over-the-counter medication. Your dentist is there for regular check-ups and emergency dental care. Your pharmacist can provide advice about medication and health conditions that can be treated with over-the-counter medication.

Developing a close relationship with this team is your starting point for forming relationships with other, more specialised, health professionals.

Second-tier healthcare team members

Members of your second-tier healthcare team will depend upon your age and if you develop specific medical conditions, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease. Although not all the team members will necessarily have conventional medical training, all can contribute something to your ongoing health.

Second-tier team members who may contribute to your core healthcare could include:

- a medical specialist, such as a cardiologist or orthopaedic surgeon
- a physical treatment professional, such as a physiotherapist, an osteopath or a chiropractor
- someone who supports your mental or emotional health, like a counsellor or psychologist
- an optometrist or audiologist for routine eye and ear tests, which are important regardless of your age or your physical health
- people to help you get fit or help you manage a healthy eating plan, such as a personal trainer or dietitian
- other allied health professionals, such as a podiatrist
- complementary medicine practitioners, such as a naturopath or acupuncturist.

Coordinating healthcare across your team

The more complex your health needs, the more interaction you are likely to have with a larger and more diverse team of health professionals. It is important to share information about your medical treatment across the team. This includes information about your past and ongoing medical care, and any medication or therapies you are taking.
Some medication interacts negatively when taken at the same time as others, and over-the-counter medication and complementary therapies can also affect this balance. This can make the therapies or treatments ineffective, or worse, detrimental to your health.

Keep a record of who’s who in your healthcare team and what part they play in your care. Share this information with family if appropriate, along with an advance care plan, if you have one. The most important thing is to keep your general practitioner informed of all the healthcare professionals you see and the treatments you are receiving.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor

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