A Primer On Primary Care

Eisenhower Primary Care 365 Program in the Eisenhower George and Julia Argyros Health Center - just one of several locations in the Valley.

A primary care physician is a doctor who takes care of a patient's overall health care needs. He or she is a person's first point of contact for health care, seeing patients for preventive care, physicals, routine tests, immunizations, and to treat acute illnesses or conditions that do not require a specialist. Family doctors, pediatricians and internists are all primary care physicians. For many older patients, a family doctor or internist who has had additional training in geriatrics may serve as a primary care physician.

Because of the unique role they play in overseeing a person's overall health care needs, primary care physicians are critical to both individual health and wellness, and to the efficiency of the health care system as a whole.

Eisenhower Medical Center's Joseph Scherger, MD, MPH, a family physician and Vice President for Primary Care, says a primary care physician is the doctor who takes care of all of you, over time. "A primary care physician's responsibility is to care for a patient's body, mind and spirit," Dr. Scherger explains. "They really should be everyone's first point of contact to help coordinate a person's care. A primary care physician may be able to handle 85 percent of someone's health care issues. For the other 15 percent, a person might need to see specialists, but it is the primary care physician who determines that need and can make that referral."

Women often use their gynecologists as primary care physicians. Together, primary care physicians and gynecologists can offer complementary care that supports a woman's overall health and wellbeing, including monitoring a patient's cardiovascular system and their other internal functions.

While a primary care physician serves as the first point of contact to the health care system, their role in their patients' care does not stop if someone needs to see a specialist. According to Dr. Scherger, it is crucial for primary care physicians to stay involved as part of the overall medical team if someone has a serious medical condition such as cancer or cardiovascular disease.

"If someone is referred to a specialist, it is important for it not to be just a hand-off from one doctor to another," explains Dr. Scherger. "There should be a lot of shared care going on, especially if people have a specific problem. They may have a regular cardiologist that they see if they have cardiovascular issues, but a primary care physician is for everything else — prostate exams, pap smears, immunizations. They may have other concerns that a primary care physician can address. A primary care physician will look at the complete picture, and ensure that a patient is getting all of the medical care that they need."

Many Options

At Eisenhower, patients have a number of options for choosing their primary care physician. The board certified physicians at Eisenhower Medical Associates offer personalized primary care with specialists in internal medicine and family medicine with practices in Rancho Mirage, Indian Wells, and Palm Desert. Additional offices will be opening in Rancho Mirage, La Quinta, and Palm Springs this winter. There is also a membership program called Eisenhower Primary Care 365, a relationship-focused practice that looks beyond office visits and creates an ongoing relationship between primary care physician and patients. There are other primary care physicians on the medical staff of Eisenhower Medical Center providing traditional primary care and concierge medicine.

A New Model for Health Care

Eisenhower Primary Care 365 is dedicated to continuous communication between patients and physicians, either through office visits with extended face-to-face time at the new Eisenhower George and Julia Argyros Health Center in La Quinta, personal phone calls, or E-visits via Eisenhower's online health care management system, RelayHealth®. Through RelayHealth, patients can communicate with their doctor from virtually anywhere, at any time, and can also access medically reviewed information on a wide variety of medical topics to help better manage their health. State-of-the-art encryption technology ensures the confidentiality of all personal information, and the system is actually more secure than either the telephone or regular E-mail. Currently, Eisenhower Primary Care 365 is available at the Eisenhower George and Julia Argyros Health Center in La Quinta, with additional locations opening this winter in Rancho Mirage and Palm Springs.

Eisenhower Urgent Care

In addition to its primary care practices, Eisenhower also offers patients options if they need immediate care. Eisenhower Urgent Care physicians at centers in Rancho Mirage, La Quinta and Cathedral City can diagnose or treat many common illnesses immediately, and onsite radiology services allow for the quick diagnosis of fractures and sprains. At urgent care, patients can get care for acute conditions that do not require an emergency room visit. Each Eisenhower Urgent Care also offers many routine vaccinations and school and sports physicals. A new Eisenhower Urgent Care will open in Palm Springs this winter.

While urgent care visits are quick and convenient, they do not replace the personalized care individuals will receive if they have a regular primary care physician who is dedicated to the oversight of their personal health.

"We have many options at Eisenhower, but I tell everyone that it is important for them to have a primary care physician," says Dr. Scherger. "Particularly in this community, where we have a number of part-time and older residents, it's important to have someone *local* who knows all of your medical history, and who can keep your overall health needs top-of-mind.*That person is a primary care physician."*

HEALTHY CHOICES

CONCIERGE CARE

Larger Annual Fee

• A concierge physician is always on call for you, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by phone or in person.
• A concierge physician will see you throughout your hospital stay.
• Concierge physicians take care of between 200 and 600 patients. Fewer overall patients translate into more time with your physician.

EISENHOWER PRIMARY CARE 365

Modest Annual Membership Fee

• You have direct and continuous online communication with your chosen physician 365 days a year. An Eisenhower Primary Care 365 physician will respond within 24 hours to routine communication. In case of an emergency, a physician is on call.
• An Eisenhower Primary Care 365 physician will become involved with your hospital stay, but will usually rely on a hospitalist to take charge of your primary management.
• Eisenhower Primary Care 365 physicians will take care of up to 900 patients, depending on age and complexity. Fewer overall patients translate into more time with your physician.

REGULAR PRIMARY CARE

No Annual Fee

• Regular primary care is delivered through scheduled appointments. Your communication goes through the office and is triaged to your physician or the staff, including a nurse practitioner or physician assistant.
• A regular primary care physician will become involved with your hospital stay, but may rely on a hospitalist or another physician to take charge of your primary management.
• Regular primary care practices take care of 1,800 patients or more.

Eisenhower Primary Care: 760-773-1460

Eisenhower Primary Care 365 program: 760-360-3365

Eisenhower Physician Referral: 760-568-1234 or emc.org/physician

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