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Finding the right doctor or dentist

Take the time to ask the right questions and follow these tips.

by *Dr. Susan Maples*

Q: My husband and I have become increasingly health conscious and health educated over the past few years. We want to take an active roll in our personal health. In that light, we've decided to seek health care providers who will work *with* us, not just *on* us. Does that make sense? Any tips on how to find such a physician or dentist?

A: A collaborative relationship with your doctor will be a wonderful experience for you! It comes down to an alignment of values, and finding that synergy will pose a greater challenge than finding clinical expertise alone.

I think the first critical factor is generosity of *time*. Two-way dialogue with your doctor takes more time than the traditional doctor-patient relationship. When you are inquiring about the office culture, be sure to ask about the pace and the doctor's patience with people who want a shared discussion.

The second, and perhaps more critical factor, is genuine *curiosity*. You will want a doctor who is curious about where you've been, where you are, and what health goals you are striving for. You will want your story and your ideas to ultimately influence the doctor's treatment recommendations. Your own curiosity should be respected too—you don't want to feel stupid or rushed because you have questions for the doctor.

Clinical expertise is a big deal. Be careful not to equate kindness with top-notch clinical knowledge. Seek a provider who has a thirst for continual learning, someone who considers staying current in their field a hobby rather than just a job.

Now...where to look? A good place to start would be the internet. The Web is a nice place to get a "feel" for the office, the values as well as practiced procedures and special expertise. Then, be sure to call or visit each one that interests you to ***interview them!*** Ask as many questions as you need to determine if you are a "fit" for one another. If you don't feel comfortable with the interview or if the office doesn't have the time or knowledge to answer your questions, it's probably not the place for you. Be patient....you deserve the best.