



Do you have a GP?

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What is the most common piece of advice a patient is given on leaving hospital? Go see your General Practitioner. But do you think we can follow this instruction ourselves?

Only 33-44 per cent of doctors in Australia have a nominated GP, and even less see them regularly. It's now time for a dose of our own medicine.

This year, the Doctors' Health Advisory Service (DHASWA) and the AMA (WA) have made access to 'Doctors for Doctors' a priority.

There are many reasons we need our own GP – preventative health checks, mental wellbeing, appropriate assessment and prescribing are all important. Self-diagnosis, self-medication and the 'corridor consult' have many ethical, professional and legal pitfalls.

So for health professionals, why do we find it so hard to see a GP?

Many doctors find it hard to see a GP in office hours and some doctors face access issues due to distance.

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10 Reasons you should have a GP

Dr Roger Sexton

1. Your GP is your independent advocate in the health system. GPs spend all their time going in to bat for their patients and are very good at it.
2. Your GP has a different set of referral networks to you and can decide who is most appropriate to see you for further specialised care. It is more than likely that your own informal network of professional friends from medical school really do not want to see you.
3. Your GP is a very broadly trained generalist and understands the broader impact of work, relationships and lifestyle on the mental and physical health of the individual.
4. GPs focus on preventive medicine including immunisation and age-appropriate health screening. This is underdone among doctors in particular.
5. GPs have recall systems and high levels of computerisation, which assist with caring for patients and reducing prescribing errors.
6. GPs are confidential and understand the importance of confidential advice to the medical profession.
7. Your GP maintains your complete medical record and can coordinate clinical handover when you are travelling or moving interstate.
8. Your GP is interested in you as a person and understands what it takes to be a sustainable and successful medical professional.
9. Your GP looks at you holistically and independently. They will see things you will not.
10. Your GP will help you live longer. There is good evidence for the benefits to longevity from having a GP. You will live longer if you have your own GP because prevention really is better.

Dr Roger Sexton is the Medical Director of Doctors Health South Australia and this article was first published in *Australian Medicine*.



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Another problem is finding the doctor who is the right fit. We all know friends or colleagues who are great doctors. The trouble is we aren't always comfortable sharing the intimate details of our lives with co-workers or social contacts.

What we want is a doctor with the appropriate professional distance with whom we can have a long-term therapeutic relationship.

The most common question DHASWA is asked is: "Where do I find a good GP?"

In response to this area of need, we have worked with the AMA (WA) DiT subcommittee to develop the DHAS WA 'Doctors for Doctors' list. This reference will be hosted online by DHASWA. It will give access to contact details for doctors who have an expressed interest in treating colleagues and who are willing to prioritise the doctor-patient relationship to improve access and care provision.

Currently, the list will include GPs and psychiatrists, with a plan to expand to other specialists including psychologists.

We all know the best thing you can do for your health is to prevent disease prior to major issues. Access to a primary care provider is the best and safest way to ensure this. We encourage all our colleagues to consider finding themselves a good GP, and hope we can assist those who need help with this.

The 'Doctors for Doctors' list is available on the DHASWA website: www.dhaswa.com.au.

To submit an expression of interest form for the 'Doctors for Doctors' visit: <http://www.dhaswa.com.au/expression-of-interest-form/> ■

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