



8 TRAITS of an OUTSTANDING PHYSICIAN

By Gary Schuster, MD

When it comes to you or your family's health, you want the reassurance that you're going to the best healthcare provider. But what actually makes a "top doctor"? Here are eight traits to consider:

1. Listening. Does your physician look you in the eye while you speak and truly listen to what you are saying? Or does he complete a note on the computer with his eyes focused on that task? In my first week of medical school, one of my professors told us that the most important determinant of understanding what's wrong with the patient is to obtain a thorough history. To accomplish this, listening was everything. You looked your patients in the eye while they spoke and also watched their body language as you asked questions and as they responded. He said that 70 percent of the

time, a doctor can determine what is wrong with the patient by history alone.

2. Taking the time. Does your doctor sit down and focus on you, or does he stand or have his hand on the door to exit? The outstanding physician will make you feel that you are his entire world when you're talking with him, and you should not feel rushed. He should not be distracted by external phone calls or messages while you are speaking.

3. Empathy. Your physician should validate your concerns. The doctor who is highly effective will be caring. He will understand what you're experiencing, both physically and emotionally, and communicate that to you.

4. Knowledge. Does your physician keep up with continuing medical education? A doctor must maintain his clinical skills as long as he's in practice. Having a degree is not enough. One continues to learn as long as one continues to practice.

5. Skills. It's not enough that a doctor is "book smart." An outstanding healthcare provider will also take into consideration the psychological aspects of what brings you into the office. When you visit a doctor's office with a headache, you may not be directly asking the physician the question, but your first thought might be whether you have brain cancer or an aneurysm. The skilled doctor will understand the unexpressed concern and address it, rather than dismissing or ignoring it.

6. Respect. As a physician, I work for you (and not the other way around). The patient has the ultimate role in determining what he wants provided. This applies whether it's an end-of-life issue or routine health care issue. The doctor's obligation is to educate the patient in such a manner that he can make an informed decision.

7. Educating. The physician should be a teacher. It's not enough for a doctor to "do as I say." As the participant in the final treatment plan, the patient is entitled to understand the decision-making behind it.

8. Promoting a healthy lifestyle. Does your doctor set a personal example of healthy living? This includes exercise, a healthy diet, appropriate screening for cancers, appropriate rest, stress reduction, and life balance.



MEET THE EXPERT

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