Dear Alice,

I've been hearing a lot about having one health care provider follow my medical history, but I'm fairly healthy and don't have a chronic disease. I've been switching from my local doctors when I'm home to the on-campus docs. Is it really that important, given that I'm a healthy individual?

Yours,

Pretty Healthy

Answer

Dear Pretty Healthy,

Plenty of students who move away from home for college are faced with the challenge of deciding between an on-campus health care provider and one at home. While splitting your care between providers may seem more convenient, there are also a lot of advantages to seeing the same provider every time you schedule a medical appointment — even if you only see them once a year.

Many health care providers will recommend you choose one primary care provider (PCP) and consider their clinic your “medical home” — the place where all your medical records are on file and you see the same provider at each visit. Seeing the same primary care provider is good for:

- Establishing trust and speaking honestly about your health care needs.
- Maintaining accurate and up to date medical records.
- Reducing mistakes in the care you receive.
- Avoiding prescription errors.
- Minimizing repetitive or unnecessary lab tests.
- Having an established relationship in place in the event of an unforeseen health or illness development.

Choosing a medical home and establishing care with one primary care provider is most critical for people with more complicated medical conditions. But even young, healthy people benefit
from having one provider they see for physicals, prescriptions, and acute health needs.

Wherever you get medical care, you can always request your records from your previous provider(s) be transferred to your current provider’s office. This will give your current provider a more comprehensive medical history and ideally lessen avoidable tests and redundant exams.

If you choose to continue to see both your provider back home and one on-campus, make sure you share that decision with both practitioners. You can often sign a release of information at medical offices so the two providers can share documents, as well as communicate directly about your care.

You can take charge of your health by maintaining updated medical records, no matter where you are, and bringing copies of documents to your appointments. In the spirit of this philosophy, talk to your healthcare provider to find out what’s best for you.

Alice!
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