



Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP) is a coalition of doctors, patients, hospitals, health plans, government agencies, and other health care organizations working to improve the quality of health care in Massachusetts. To learn more go to www.mhqp.org.

Ways to learn more about quality health care:

- *Consumer Reports* is an expert, independent, nonprofit organization that works to ensure a fair, just, and safe marketplace for all consumers and empower consumers to protect themselves. Learn more at www.consumerreports.org.
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' *Physician Compare* website has information about Medicare-enrolled physicians and health care professionals <http://www.medicare.gov/find-a-doctor/>.
- The Massachusetts Board of Registry in Medicine is a state agency that allows patients to learn about their doctors or file a complaint. The website is www.mass.gov/massmedboard.

When patients have a good experience with doctors, they are more likely to come back for tests, take medications as prescribed, and better manage their care at home. Quality health care matters a lot to both patients and doctors.

—Michael Cantor, M.D., Chief Medical Officer of the New England Quality Care Alliance.

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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

This report is made possible thanks to funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, measurable, and timely change. For 40 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime.

QUALITY HEALTH CARE:

How Patients Can Help Coordinate Their Care



You want quality health care. Your doctor wants that, too. But is your health care as good as it should be? *Consumer Reports* and *Massachusetts Health Quality Partners* (MHQP) teamed up to answer that question.

The best quality health care takes place when doctors – along with nurse practitioners, physician assistants, other clinicians, and office staff – work as partners with patients, family members, caregivers, and the public.

What does it mean to be partners in health care? That is when doctors and patients work closely together—talking about health problems, making thoughtful choices, and coming up with plans that patients can, and will, follow.



This brochure looks at many aspects of quality health care. It includes:

- Questions about coordinating your care.
- Results showing how Massachusetts patients answered these questions.
- Boxes to check with your answers about quality health care.
- Ways that patients can partner with their doctors.

We hope that this helps explain some aspects of quality health care. For more information, visit MHQP's website www.mhqp.org.



Below are questions you can answer about experiences with your doctor. There are also lists of what patients can do to help make care better.

How often does your doctor seem informed and up-to-date about the care you receive from specialists?

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 63% said that their doctors always do this. Does your doctor know about the care you get from specialists?

Yes, always Sometimes No, never

What you can do:

- Tell your doctor about all the specialists that you see. Discuss why you go and what happens in these visits. Also talk about any tests, treatments, or medications that specialists prescribe or suggest you to have.
- Ask the specialists to contact your doctor. This helps avoid duplicate care, when patients get two or more of the same treatments or tests. It may also prevent problems when patients take two or more drugs that should not be used together.
- Request copies of all letters and reports that specialists send to your doctor.

When patients need certain types of care, they may go to specialists such as heart doctors, acupuncturists, chiropractors, herbalists, alternative health care practitioners, or other health care providers. Your primary care doctor should know about all the specialists that you see.



When your doctor orders a blood test, X-ray, or other test, does someone from the office give you the results?

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 72% said that their doctors always do this. Does your doctor or doctor's office staff tell you about all your test results?

Yes, always Sometimes No, never

What you can do:

- Ask the doctor when to expect your test results. Call the doctor's office if you do not get results by that time.
- Find out how you will get the test results. This could be by phone, letter, or online with a secure patient portal (website).
- Be sure to learn about all your tests, even when results are normal. This helps doctors and patients make sure that no test results are missed.
- Ask for a written copy of your test results. Add this to the file you keep with your other health information.

Doctors should tell patients about all their test results. This includes results from blood tests, x-rays, and other routine or special tests.

Is the doctor's office staff as helpful as you think they should be?

Staff includes nurse practitioners, physician's assistants, receptionists, and people in the billing office.

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 57% said that their doctor's staff is helpful. Is the staff at your doctor's office as helpful as you think they should be?

Yes, always Sometimes No, never

What you can do:

- Ask politely, but firmly, if you need help. When you are polite, office staff are more likely to respond to your requests.
- Be patient if you have problems. But do tell the staff person that you expect him or her to be more helpful.
- Speak up if you still do not get the help you need. Tell the office manager or doctor about any problems you are having with the office staff.

A patient's experience is not just about the doctor. It also is about whether the office staff treats patients in ways that are helpful and polite.



Does the doctor's office staff treat you with courtesy and respect?

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 73% said that their doctor's office staff always does this. Does staff at your doctor's office treat you with courtesy and respect?

Yes, always Sometimes No, never

What you can do:

- Tell the doctor or office manager if you feel that a staff person is not treating you with courtesy or respect.
- Be calm and polite, but do speak up. There is no reason to be shy when talking about problems you have with the doctor's office staff.
- Tell the doctor or office manager how you would like to resolve this problem. For instance, do you want an apology from this staff person? Or would you prefer to be seen by someone else in the doctor's office?

"It takes courage to speak up," says Helen Osborne, a health literacy consultant based in Natick, MA. Even though she has worked in health care for many years, when someone in the doctor's office spoke to her in a way that felt rude and disrespectful, it took almost a year before Osborne had the courage to tell her doctor.