

Your PCP:
A Prescription for Good Health





Louis Heyl, MD, and Jared North, medical scribe.

Your PCP: A Prescription for Good Health

Establishing a relationship with a primary care doctor you trust is one of the most important steps you can take to protect and maintain your health. In Pittsburgh's northern communities, there are hundreds of UPMC family practice and internal medicine doctors ready to serve you close to home and work.

Whether you're the picture of perfect health or you struggle with ongoing health problems, having a primary care physician (PCP) has important, long-term benefits.

"You need a doctor who knows your history and knows your health," says Louis Heyl, MD, of Genesis Medical Associates in West View and chairman of the Department of Primary Care at UPMC Passavant. "We provide patients continuity of care, manage chronic conditions, and help them make decisions. We're their partners in health care."

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, research shows that people with regular access to a primary care doctor live longer, healthier lives, are less likely to die from illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, and strokes, and have lower overall health care costs.

"Continuity of care is key," agrees John Wisneski, MD, an internal medicine doctor with PrimeCare Medical Associates-UPMC in Aspinwall and chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine at UPMC St. Margaret. "Having a PCP allows you to form a relationship. You get to know each other, which builds trust and leads to better medical care because we can catch health problems early when they are more treatable."

WHAT IS A PCP?

A PCP is a medical doctor who typically specializes in either internal or family medicine. An internist typically cares for adults age 18 and older, although patients can be as young as 14. Family medicine doctors usually provide care

for patients of all ages, from newborns to seniors. Trained to diagnose and treat a broad range of health conditions, a PCP can see patients for anything from a sore throat, annual physical, or routine preventive tests, to a more complex chronic disease, sudden illness, or injury.

"Having an established relationship with a PCP is very important," says Chris Olbrich, MD, of Penn Plum Family Medicine-UPMC in Aspinwall and chairman of the Department of Family Medicine at UPMC St. Margaret. "People who have a PCP are more likely to receive preventive care, such as cancer screenings, and better management of chronic conditions."

That's because aside from an annual physical that gives you a top-to-bottom health check, the continuity of care can help identify certain health conditions that may not have obvious symptoms, he explains. "Seeing your doctor yearly also creates a baseline for better medical decision making."

Lawrenceville resident Josh Bayer, a patient of Dr. Olbrich for more than 20 years, sees his family doctor regularly for monitoring of cholesterol and iron levels and blood pressure management. He also faithfully returns for his yearly checkup, routine screenings, flu shot, and other immunizations.

"Dr. Olbrich is aware of my family history of heart disease and he's working hard to keep me from developing it," says Josh, 66. "He also detected my kidney disease, then helped me get an appointment with a specialist, stayed in communication, and helped explain things. That was very comforting."



Josh Bayer, a patient of Dr. Olbrich



CHRIS OLBRICH, MD

Penn Plum Family
Medicine-UPMC
Chairman, Department
of Family Medicine,
UPMC St. Margaret



JOHN WISNESKI, MD

PrimeCare Medical
Associates-UPMC
Chairman, Department of
Internal Medicine,
UPMC St. Margaret

YOUR TEAMMATE IN HEALTH

Aspinwall resident Patricia Artz has been in good health for most of her 70 years—something she attributes to the good relationship she has with Dr. Wisneski, her PCP for at least two decades.

"Your health is a big thing. As you get older, you realize how important it is to have a doctor you know and trust," says Patricia. "Dr. Wisneski is my teammate in health. He's always there when I need him and he's always doing what he can to keep me healthy."

Patricia recently went to the emergency department at UPMC St. Margaret because of a blocked artery. When she opened her eyes, Dr. Wisneski was standing beside her bed. "It actually was my first time in a hospital and it was kind of scary. But it was reassuring to see him there," she says.

Dr. Wisneski considered Patricia's individual case and leveraged UPMC's network of specialists to ensure efficient and convenient access to world-class cardiac surgeons in Pittsburgh. Throughout her experience, she knew Dr. Wisneski would be kept informed by his UPMC colleagues and through shared access to UPMC's electronic medical records system.

"He was involved throughout the entire process. I knew as long as I had his stamp of approval on it, everything would be okay," Patricia says. "Even with follow-up tests,

Dr. Wisneski calls me to explain the results. That's very comforting."

NAVIGATING THE HEALTH CARE MAZE

A PCP also coordinates care, serving as the point person in helping patients navigate the often-confusing U.S. health care system. In addition to ordering the right tests and diagnostics, a PCP helps patients find specialists and answers questions regarding care.

"We guide patients through the maze that is modern health care," says Dr. Olbrich. "We also act as translators, interpreting the language of specialists into something patients understand."

For Dina Serpa, the term "family doctor" has a special meaning. At age 41, she's been Dr. Heyl's patient for 26 years. It's the same medical practice her mother used (she was cared for by Dr. Heyl's father, who began the practice); her sister and other relatives have been long-time patients there, too.

Dina credits Dr. Heyl with guiding her through difficult health issues, including a rare form of bone cancer and a genetic disorder that causes high levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol, which led to two heart attacks in her 30s. Even though she sees multiple specialists, she insists on reviewing test results and medical reports with Dr. Heyl.

"He listens and breaks things down in a way that's understandable. I trust him," explains Dina, a Brighton Heights' resident.

"If it weren't for Dr. Heyl and the others in his practice, I might not be here today. I have a complicated medical history, and he's been there with me every step of the way. I definitely wouldn't go anywhere else."

– Dina Serpa

"If it weren't for Dr. Heyl and the others in his practice, I might not be here today. I have a complicated medical history, and he's been there with me every step of the way. I definitely wouldn't go anywhere else."

CARE FOR A LIFETIME

Primary care focuses on the whole patient. By building relationships with patients over time, both internal and family medicine doctors develop a comprehensive understanding of their patients' health history, lifestyle, and goals.

Benefits of Having a PCP

Your internal or family medicine doctor will:

- Be familiar with you, your lifestyle, and health history
- Be your "go to" when you're sick or healthy
- Provide care for chronic and ongoing conditions
- Provide routine screenings and preventive care, including vaccinations
- Provide physicals (school, sports, truck driver, and more)
- Monitor blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol
- Maintain your health records
- Refer you to medical specialists when necessary
- Manage life-threatening and "silent" medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, cancer, and diabetes

"We get to know patients over a period of time and follow them through life's changes," says Dr. Heyl. "That relationship builds trust and encourages patients to talk honestly and openly about their health concerns and important health decisions."

Dr. Wisneski, who has a special interest in geriatrics, says PCPs provide important health care and guidance throughout a patient's life.

"A specialist can take care of [a specific organ such as] your heart or your gall bladder, but you really need a PCP to manage your health. You need someone to take care of you when you're healthy and when you're sick, when you're in the hospital, and when you go home," says Dr. Wisneski.

"And when it comes time to make difficult medical decisions, who is better to help you than someone who has been caring for you over a lifetime?"

To find a PCP, visit the UPMC Primary Care website where its customized portal makes it easy to search for and find a primary care doctor whose office is close to your home or work. Visit www.upmc.com/PrimaryCare or call 855-676-UPMCPCP. ■

UPMC
LIFE CHANGING MEDICINE