

# HEALTH

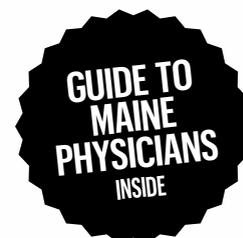
SPECIAL  
REPORT FOR  
**MAINE  
RESIDENTS**



## CHOOSING THE RIGHT DOCTOR FOR YOU

Consumer Reports  
Ratings help you compare  
medical groups on  
key measures

DOCTORS  
**Ratings  
of 139  
Primary  
Care Doctor  
Groups in  
the State**



# HOW DOES YOUR DOCTOR COMPARE?

*The Ratings of primary care physician groups help consumers in eight states evaluate practices on key measures*

**EVERYONE NEEDS** a primary care doctor. That's the person who knows you best, refers you to specialists, and follows up on care. But what do you look for when choosing a primary care doctor?

"For many people, the most important thing is that they like their doctor," says John Santa, M.D., a medical consultant for Consumer Reports who has studied the qualities that make a good physician—and how to measure that—for more than two decades. "They want to feel that their doctor listens and understands them."

Just as important, Santa says, is "whether your doctor is skilled at what he or she is paid to do—keep you healthy, help you recover from an illness or injury, or help you manage a chronic disease, like diabetes or high blood pressure."

You might think it would be easy to find out how well physicians perform those essential functions. But it's not, for several reasons.

To start, there's the size of the doctor population: Almost a million practicing physicians are in the U.S. And roughly half are primary care doctors. Who is responsible for gathering information on them all?

At least as problematic: How is a doctor's performance measured, anyway? After all, primary care doctors take on many tasks—from ordering cancer screening tests to treating infections, from managing chronic diseases such as heart

disease to coordinating care with specialists. So which criteria exactly should they be judged on?

Once those questions get answered, how are physicians persuaded to share that information—or where can interested parties go to gather it? And how can the information be presented in a way that's accepted by medical professionals as accurate and fair, and still be useful to patients?

## **First Steps**

A network of patients, doctors, hospitals, employers, and insurers from 40 regions across the country, funded in part by the

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has over the past several years tried to tackle those problems.

"There's currently little ability to compare physician practices even in the same community, let alone across the country," says Elizabeth Mitchell, president and CEO of the Network for Regional Healthcare Improvement, a nonprofit organization involved in efforts to make physician reporting more standard and transparent. "We need to correct that, so doctors can see how they can improve and so that patients can get information they need to choose doctors."

As part of that effort, eight of those regions—California; Massachusetts; Maine; Minnesota; Washington; Wisconsin; the greater Columbus, Ohio, area; and the greater Detroit area—have agreed to publish Ratings of physician groups in Consumer Reports magazine. "It's an important step in bringing this information directly to consumers," Santa says. "But it also shows how hard it is to rate doctors and how far we still have to go."

For example, some of those regions are much farther along in their efforts than others. Minnesota has now gathered information on nearly all of the primary care providers in the state, thanks largely to a state law that has required doctors to gather and publicly share that information since 2010.

In other states reporting is voluntary



or limited to physicians affiliated with certain health insurance plans or large medical groups. In Massachusetts, for example, the data come from physicians who belong to the state's five largest commercial health insurance plans. In California, the information is limited to doctors who are affiliated with health maintenance organizations. And in Columbus the data come from five of that region's medical groups. So in most of the regions, the information is available for only a subset of physicians.

"These regions all deserve credit for pushing for this effort, as do practices that have agreed to share the information—especially those who may not do so well," Santa says. "That takes courage and a commitment to honesty and transparency—qualities that are also essential to good medicine."

### What We Measure

The Ratings Consumer Reports is publishing for each region focus on how well doctors provide evidence-based care for common health problems. Depending on the specific region, those include health concerns such as diagnosing back pain, treating diabetes or heart disease, and how often they provide the right screening tests for breast cancer, colon cancer, and cervical cancer.

"We focused on those areas because

## TIPS ON USING THESE RATINGS

**1 Check to see whether your doctor's practice, group, or clinic is listed.** If it is, see how it compares with others in your area. If it doesn't do as well as others, ask your doctor why, and what the group is doing to improve.

**2 If your group is not listed, ask your doctor why it doesn't participate.** And ask whether the practice knows how it performs on those measures, even if it doesn't publicly report. Many do have that information. If you're not satisfied with the answers you get, you could consider looking for another group.

**3 Gather other information on your physician.** That includes everything from whether the doctor accepts your insurance to whether he or she has been disciplined by a state medical board for inappropriate behavior or dangerous care. See "What You Don't Know About Your Doctor Can Hurt You," on page 30 of the May 2016 issue of Consumer Reports magazine for advice on where to go for that kind of information.

they all relate to important, widespread health problems and because how well physicians perform in those measures may provide some indication of their overall quality of care," says Jim Chase, president of MN Community Measurement, the Minnesota organization that has been collecting and reporting data on physician performance since 2003.

### Individual Doctors vs. Groups

In all eight of the regions, the Ratings apply not to individual doctors but to groups of physicians, usually relatively small practices that work together in the same office or clinic.

That focus on groups rather than individual doctors is partly because to get statistically meaningful results requires lumping together the results of multiple physicians.

But there's another reason. "Yes, your specific doctor is important," Chase says. "But physicians, especially today, almost always practice as part of a team, so how good a job they do also depends on how good that teamwork is."

In addition, doctors, like the rest of us, sometimes move from one job to another, or to another town or state. Because many patients stick with their physician group rather than follow their doctor, it's important to get insight into how well the whole practice performs.

### Maine

## THE PROS AND CONS OF DOCTOR RATINGS

Maine's physician Ratings focus on how well doctors in the state care for people who have received a diagnosis of diabetes, heart disease,

or high blood pressure. And the Ratings have some strengths. For one, they are based on comprehensive measures established by two national accreditation organizations, Bridges to Excellence and the National Committee on Quality Assurance. "That makes the measures rigorous and respected," says John Santa, M.D., a consultant to Consumer Reports.

And physicians in the state have used the data to improve their care, especially when it comes to

managing patients with heart disease and diabetes, according to the Maine Health Management Coalition (MHMC), the nonprofit organization that gathers and reports physician data.

On the other hand, participation is voluntary, and only about half of the state's practices have elected to be rated. Plus results become public only if a clinic does well in the accreditation process. Only 22 of the 139 practices show scores for all three measures.

Still, the Ratings can help identify practices that provide top care: Twenty-one got a top score in at least two measures. Only three practices—Inland Family Care in Oakland, Inland Family Care in Waterville, and River Valley Internal Medicine in Rumford—earned top scores in all three.

In addition, the Ratings suggest areas in which doctors could be doing more. Notably, only 42 clinics are rated in controlling high blood pressure measure. That's

worrisome because that health problem is on the rise in Maine, yet federal statistics show that about one in five people with the condition don't receive a diagnosis.

That lack of information makes it difficult for patients to make informed choices when choosing doctors to treat the problem, says Andy Webber, president and CEO of MHMC. "We hope these Ratings will motivate doctors to take a more aggressive approach to the problem," he said.

# WHAT'S BEHIND THE RATINGS?

These Ratings include information on 139 primary care doctors' offices in Maine, representing about half of those kinds of medical groups in the state. All of those practices voluntarily share their performance data. These Ratings are published with the Maine Health Management Coalition, a nonprofit organization that includes health insurers, hospitals, health plans, and doctors working together to measure and report healthcare value.

## What Are the Clinics Rated On?

*The practices are rated on three measures:*

- 1. Diabetes Care** is based on how well the practice cares for people with diabetes by, for example, controlling blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels, and whether it appropriately checks for complications of the disease such as eye disease, kidney disease, and sores on the feet.
- 2. Heart Disease Care** is based on how well the practice cares for people with heart disease by, for example, controlling cholesterol and blood pressure levels and prescribing low-dose aspirin and other medications to reduce the risks of heart attacks and strokes.
- 3. High Blood Pressure** is based on how well the practice diagnoses and treats high blood pressure by, for example, measuring it appropriately and checking for complications of the disease.

## How Are the Scores Determined?

How well practices perform on those measures is vetted by either Bridges to Excellence or the National Committee on Quality Assurance, nonprofit organizations that accredit doctors, hospitals, and other healthcare organizations based on how well they follow established guidelines for care. Top-rated groups receive a 4 in that measure; those that get a 3 are "very good"; and those that get a 2 are "good." A Rating of "-" indicates that the group did not meet the standards of one of the accreditation groups, did not submit data for that measure, or had too few patients to be measured accurately.

## How Should I Use the Ratings?

Check the Ratings to see whether your doctor's medical group is listed and if so, how it compares with others in your area. The Ratings can help you compare and choose practices even if you don't have diabetes, heart disease, or high blood pressure, because how well a group performs in these areas may provide some information

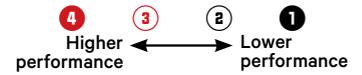
on how it performs overall.

If your doctor's group is not listed, ask why not. Also ask your doctor whether he or she knows how the practice performed on those measures. Many have that information, even if they don't report it publicly.

## Where Can I Find More Details?

Go to the website for the Maine Health Management Coalition, at [getbettermaine.org](http://getbettermaine.org), where you can find additional information on those and other measures. That includes how satisfied patients are with the practices based on how well the providers communicate with patients, how quickly patients get appointments, and other factors.





NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>AROOSTOOK</b>				
Fish River Rural Health - Eagle Lake	Eagle Lake	3	3	-
Fort Fairfield Health Center	Fort Fairfield	3	4	3
Pines Health Services - Caribou	Caribou	3	3	-
Pines Health Services - Fort Fairfield	Fort Fairfield	3	3	-
Pines Health Services - Presque Isle Health Center	Presque Isle	2	3	-
Pines Health Services - St. John Valley Health Center	Van Buren	3	3	-
Pines Washburn Health Center	Washburn	2	3	-
TAMC - Caribou Health Center	Caribou	3	-	4
TAMC - Mars Hill Health Center	Mars Hill	2	3	-
TAMC - Women's Health Care	Presque Isle	3	-	4

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>CENTRAL</b>				
Augusta Family Medicine	Augusta	2	2	-
Augusta Internal Medical Associates	Augusta	2	3	-
Belgrade Regional Health Center	Belgrade	2	2	-
Bingham Area Health Center	Bingham	2	3	-
Capital Family Practice	Augusta	2	3	-
DFD Russell Medical Center - Monmouth	Monmouth	3	3	-
Elmwood Primary Care	Waterville	2	2	-
Four Seasons Family Practice	Fairfield	2	2	-
Gardiner Family Medicine	Gardiner	2	2	-
Gene Cheng, M.D.	Augusta	3	3	-
Hallowell Family Practice	Hallowell	2	2	-
Inland Family Care - Downtown	Waterville	4	-	4
Inland Family Care - Fairfield	Fairfield	3	4	4
Inland Family Care - Madison/Skowhegan	Madison	3	4	4
Inland Family Care - North Anson	North Anson	3	-	4
Inland Family Care - Oakland	Oakland	4	4	4
Inland Family Care - Waterville	Waterville	4	4	4
Inland Medical Associates	Waterville	4	-	4
Inland Medical Associates - Internal Medicine	Waterville	4	-	4
Lovejoy Health Center	Albion	2	2	-
Maine Dartmouth Family Practice	Waterville	2	2	-



NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>CENTRAL continued</b>				
MaineGeneral Internal Medicine	Waterville	2	3	-
Mid-Maine Medicine - Vassalboro	North Vassalboro	2	2	-
Mid-Maine Medicine - Waterville	Waterville	2	2	-
Oakland Family Medicine	Oakland	2	2	-
Twin Pines Family Medicine	Oakland	3	2	2
Winthrop Family Medicine	Winthrop	2	2	-

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>CUMBERLAND</b>				
Bridgton Internal Medicine	Bridgton	3	4	3
Brunswick Family Medicine	Brunswick	3	-	2
Brunswick Primary Care	Brunswick	4	4	-
Falmouth Internal Medicine	Falmouth	2	-	3
Gray Family Health Center	Gray	3	4	4
InterMed Family Practice - Yarmouth	Yarmouth	3	4	-
InterMed Internal Medicine - Marginal Way	Portland	3	4	-
Maine Medical Partners - Cape Elizabeth - Internal Medicine	Cape Elizabeth	3	3	-
Maine Medical Partners - Falmouth - Internal Medicine	Falmouth	2	3	-
Maine Medical Partners - Lakes Region - Primary Care	Windham	2	3	-
Maine Medical Partners - Scarborough - Family Medicine	Scarborough	2	3	-
Maine Medical Partners - Scarborough - Internal Medicine	Scarborough	3	3	-
Maine Medical Partners - Westbrook - Family Medicine	Westbrook	3	3	-
Maine Medical Partners - Westbrook - Internal Medicine	Westbrook	3	3	-
Mark Braun, M.D.	Scarborough	2	3	-
Martin's Point Health Care - Brunswick	Brunswick	2	-	4
Martin's Point Health Care - Brunswick Bowdoin	Brunswick	2	4	3
Naples Family Practice	Naples	4	-	4
North Bridgton Family Practice	North Bridgton	3	3	3
Pondicherry Family Practice	Bridgton	4	-	4
Portland Community Health Center - Healthcare for the Homeless Program	Portland	2	3	-

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>DOWNEAST</b>				
Arnold Memorial Medical Center	Jonesport	3	4	4
Community Health Center	Southwest Harbor	2	3	-
Cooper Gilmore Health Center	Bar Harbor	2	3	-

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>MIDCOAST</b>				
Donald S. Walker Health Center	Liberty	3	3	-
Full Circle Family Medicine	Damariscotta	2	3	-
Inland Family Care - Unity	Unity	3	4	4
Lifespan Family Healthcare	Newcastle	2	3	-
Lincoln Medical Partners - Family Medicine - Boothbay	Boothbay Harbor	3	3	-
Lincoln Medical Partners - Family Medicine - Damariscotta	Damariscotta	3	3	-
Lincoln Medical Partners - Family Medicine - Waldoboro	Waldoboro	2	2	-
Lincoln Medical Partners - Family Medicine - Wiscasset	Wiscasset	2	3	-
Lincoln Medical Partners - Internal Medicine	Damariscotta	2	3	-
Mid Coast Medical Group - Bath	Bath	2	3	-
Mid Coast Medical Group - Topsham - Internal Medicine	Topsham	3	3	-
Pen Bay Family Medicine Practice	Rockport	3	3	-
Pen Bay Internal Medicine	Rockport	3	3	-
Robert Laurence, M.D.	Rockport	3	3	-
Robert Merrill, M.D.	Rockport	3	3	-
Searsport Health Center	Searsport	2	2	-
Sheepscot Valley Health Center	Coopers Mills	2	2	-
Stockton Springs Regional Health Center	Stockton Springs	3	3	-
Topsham Family Medicine	Topsham	3	3	4
Waldo County Medical Partners Family Medicine	Belfast	2	3	-
Waldo County Medical Partners Family Practice	Belfast	3	3	-
Waldoboro Family Medicine	Waldoboro	3	3	-
Winterport Community Health Center	Winterport	3	3	-

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>PENQUIS</b>				
Brewer Health Center	Brewer	4	4	-
Corinth Medical Associates	Corinth	2	2	-
Dexter Internal Medicine	Dexter	2	2	-
Dover-Foxcroft Family Medicine	Dover-Foxcroft	2	2	-
EMMC - Family Medicine in Brewer	Brewer	3	-	2
EMMC - Husson Family Medicine	Bangor	3	4	4
EMMC - Husson Internal Medicine	Bangor	3	3	4
Guilford Medical Associates	Guilford	2	2	-
Health Access Network - Millinocket	Millinocket	2	3	-
Health Access Network - Lincoln	Lincoln	2	2	-
Health Access Network - Medway	Medway	3	3	-
Helen Hunt Health Center	Old Town	2	3	-
Milo Family Practice	Milo	2	2	-
St. Joseph Family Medicine	Bangor	3	-	4
St. Joseph Family Medicine - Brewer	Brewer	3	-	3
St. Joseph Family Medicine - Hampden	Hampden	2	3	4

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>WESTERN</b>				
Bethel Family Health Center	Bethel	2	2	-
Central Maine Family Practice	Lewiston	4	4	3
Central Maine Internal Medicine	Lewiston	3	4	4
DFD Russell Medical Center - Turner	Turner	3	3	-
Elsomore Dixfield Family Medicine	Dixfield	4	-	4
Family Health Care Associates	Auburn	3	-	3
Franklin Health - Farmington Family Practice	Farmington	2	2	-
Franklin Health - Internal Medicine	Farmington	2	2	-
Franklin Health - Livermore Falls Family Practice	Livermore Falls	2	3	-
Fryeburg Family Medicine	Fryeburg	3	-	3
Knapp Family Practice	Livermore Falls	2	2	-

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>WESTERN continued</b>				
Kurt M. Oswald, M.D.	Auburn	2	3	-
L-A Internal Medicine	Auburn	3	3	-
Lisbon Family Practice	Lisbon	3	4	4
Mechanic Falls Family Practice	Mechanic Falls	2	-	2
Minot Avenue Family Medicine	Auburn	4	-	3
Mt. Abram Health Center	Kingfield	2	2	-
Oxford Hills Internal Medicine Group	Norway	2	3	-
Pamela J. Wansker, D.O.	Greene	3	3	-
Poland Community Health Center	Poland	3	4	4
Poland Family Practice	Poland	2	3	-
Rangeley Family Medicine	Rangeley	2	2	-
Richard Kappelmann, M.D.	Lewiston	3	3	-
River Valley Internal Medicine	Rumford	4	4	4
Saco Valley Health Center	Porter	2	2	-
St. Mary's Center for Family Medicine at Mollison Way	Lewiston	3	3	-
St. Mary's Medical Associates	Lewiston	2	3	-
Strong Area Health Center	Strong	2	2	-
Swift River Family Medicine	Rumford	3	4	3

NAME	CITY	DIABETES CARE	HEART CARE	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
<b>YORK</b>				
Galbraith Family Medicine LLC	Limerick	2	3	-
Martin's Point Health Care - Biddeford	Biddeford	2	-	2
Seacoast Medical Care	Biddeford	3	3	-
SMHC Family Medicine - Kennebunk	Kennebunk	2	3	-
SMHC Family Medicine - Saco	Saco	2	3	-
SMHC Family Medicine - Sanford	Sanford	2	3	-
SMHC Internal Medicine - Biddeford	Biddeford	2	3	-
SMHC Internal Medicine - Kennebunk	Kennebunk	2	3	-
SMHC Internal Medicine - Old Orchard Beach	Old Orchard Beach	2	3	-
SMHC Internal Medicine - Sanford	Sanford	2	3	-

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# 6 STEPS TO WORKING BETTER WITH YOUR DOCTOR

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People who feel that their physician listens to them and involves them in treatment decisions are more likely to get screened for conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and high cholesterol, and to get the vaccine shots they need, research suggests.

Of course, it's not always easy to find a doctor who listens. Here are six concerns that commonly crop up in the doctor-patient relationship, and what to do to make the relationship better:

## *PROBLEM 1*

### **Your Doctor Doesn't Listen**

Maybe when you try to tell your doctor what's bothering you, she interrupts, without looking up from her chart or computer screen. Or she's all business, which makes it difficult for you to ask questions, or sticks to a checklist of yes-or-no questions that makes it difficult for you to mention all of your health concerns.

**THE FIX** Let your doctor know that you feel nervous about asking questions or that you can better focus on what she's saying if she faces you instead of the computer. And instead of relaying just your symptoms ("my head hurts"), tell a full story: Describe when the pain started, your activities at the time, and the physical sensations you're experiencing.

## *PROBLEM 2*

### **Your Doctor Makes Decisions Without Your Input**

Your doctor should always discuss the pros and cons of treatment options, then help you make an informed choice. That shared decision-making can increase your chances of positive results

because it boosts the likelihood that you'll stick with the treatment. Plus "your satisfaction level will be higher if you feel you've been a part of the decision," says John Santa, M.D., a medical adviser at Consumer Reports. "Your tolerance level, if things don't go well, will be better, too."

**THE FIX** If your doctor isn't receptive to your ideas, ask how the benefits and risks of his recommendations compare with your preferences. One helpful strategy: Ask whether you can have some time to think about his suggestions. A little breathing room will allow you to do some research so that you have a better handle on your options. Or if you'll be discussing a serious problem, take a family member along with you to the appointment.

## *PROBLEM 3*

### **Your Doctor Discourages Second Opinions**

Second opinions aren't needed for everyday concerns, but if you're facing a potentially serious condition, a diagnosis is unclear, the condition is quite rare, or a course of treatment isn't straightforward or may be risky, having someone else weigh in is wise. Although it's common to be concerned about second-guessing your doctor, remember that physicians consult colleagues all the time.

**THE FIX** Ask your doctor for her recommendation on who to see for a second opinion, suggests Orly Avitzur, M.D., Consumer Reports' medical director. Or if you have a particular healthcare provider in mind, run it by your current doctor to help get her onboard. When

seeing the second doctor, be sure to take relevant test results so that tests aren't duplicated. Insurance usually covers second (and even third) opinions, but always double-check before you go.

## *PROBLEM 4*

### **The Doctor's Office Is Disorganized**

Perhaps no one returns calls in a timely manner, it's difficult to get drug refills or test results, or the doctor always runs behind. "A disorganized office wastes your time, can result in poor care, and increases the likelihood of medical errors," says Marvin M. Lipman, M.D., Consumer Reports' chief medical adviser.

**THE FIX** Mention the problem to your doctor. She may be able to address concerns by having a staff member update patients on office wait times every 20 minutes, for instance. If the receptionist or office manager seems receptive, ask how to communicate efficiently—by secure email, perhaps—or whether you can book appointments and get test results and prescription refills via a patient portal. If you're tired of wasting time in the waiting room, try booking the first appointment of the day, or call the office before you go in for an appointment to get an estimate on wait times. And go out of your way to treat office staff well.

## *PROBLEM 5*

### **You Feel Your Doctor Doesn't Respect You**

Does your physician "scold" you about your weight or your sedentary lifestyle? Or do you think she's being patronizing because of your age?

**THE FIX** Keep in mind that you

both have the same goal—your health—and she may not realize how her behavior or delivery affects you, or understand how challenging a health problem may be for you. So let your doctor know that you feel criticized or dismissed. And if you're struggling with a problem—for example, quitting smoking—ask whether she can recommend extra support, such as a structured smoking cessation program.

## *PROBLEM 6*

### **Your Doctor Withholds Information About Your Health**

In some cases, a doctor may not fully discuss the costs or potential side effects of a medication or procedure, or may be uncomfortable about sharing bad news when a patient is dealing with a serious illness. Though some of us might feel overwhelmed by medical details or negative news, not having the entire picture may lead you to stop taking a vital drug or ignore her advice. "When patients believe in their doctor, they have better results," Santa says.

**THE FIX** Tell your doctor that you want to know about side effects, recovery periods, and more.