

HEALTH

SPECIAL
REPORT FOR
CALIFORNIA
RESIDENTS



CHOOSING THE RIGHT DOCTORS & HOSPITALS FOR YOU

New information on the
cost and quality of healthcare
in California

DOCTORS

**Ratings of More Than
180 Primary Care
Doctor Groups
in the State**

HOSPITALS

**Where to Get Your
Hip or Knee Replaced**

COSTS

**How Much You Pay
Depends on Where
You Live**



CHECK UP ON YOUR DOCTOR & HOSPITAL

New information on the cost and quality of medical care helps California consumers compare healthcare providers

WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, say, a new refrigerator, you probably start by going online to find one with the features you want plus good ratings and reviews. Next, you probably compare the stores that stock that model to find the best price. But shopping for good, affordable doctors and hospitals is a lot more complicated.

For one thing, reliable information about a doctor, a doctor group, or a hospital is hard to come by. And trying to find high-quality medical care that is affordable can be even more difficult.

Consumer Reports is now working on two related efforts in California that are trying to help residents solve those problems by giving them information on the cost of healthcare as well as the information they need to compare doctors and hospitals on quality.

In one we looked at the care provided by primary care physicians. We focused not on individual doctors but teams of physicians who work together. We compared them on how well they performed in certain basic areas, such as screening patients for cancer, ordering the right tests for back pain, and managing diabetes or high blood pressure.

That data come from the Integrated Healthcare Association (IHA), a nonprofit organization that focuses on improving the quality and lowering the cost of healthcare in California. The project is funded in part by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The second is a collaboration among Consumer Reports; the California Department

of Insurance; and the University of California, San Francisco. It compares hospitals on two common health concerns that bring people to those institutions: childbirth, and hip and knee replacement.

"The price and quality of medical procedures can differ dramatically from one medical provider to another," says Dave Jones, commissioner of the state's Department of Insurance. "So it's important for patients and their families to research the price and quality of care in their area," he says.

Find the Right Doctor Group

The Ratings in this section look at doctor groups, not individual physicians, for several reasons.



First, getting statistically meaningful results can require combining the data of multiple physicians.

More important, "doctors today increasingly don't function as individuals as much as they do as teams," says Doris Peter, Ph.D., director of the Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center. "So how well an individual doctor performs depends in part on how good that teamwork is."

And in California, information on physician performance comes from a subset of groups that have been created expressly to function as teams. There are more than 180 of the groups, all affiliated with one or more of the state's 10 leading health maintenance organizations, often consisting of several hundred physicians.

They have large networks of physicians and other experts to manage patients, and put a premium on good communication among providers to make sure that patients get the right screening tests and that chronic diseases are managed properly.

An added benefit of this model of care is that the groups, as part of their effort to improve quality and control costs, gather and publicly report their performance data—which is why they can be compared, at least against each other.

"We think Californians choosing healthcare providers should start by looking for groups that follow this integrated model of care," says Jeffrey Rideout, president and CEO of IHA. "Any group that participates

is committed to high quality and low cost, and is also committed to transparency.”

That transparency also allows consumers to compare practices in their own communities, so they can make smart decisions when choosing a doctor group. And there are often important differences among those groups, sometimes even in the same neighborhoods, with some earning top scores and others receiving low ones (see the Ratings in this section for details).

Making that data available reveals variation in the care provided by physicians in different parts of the state. For example, our analysis shows that groups in Northern California performed better, on average, than those in Southern California on all three of the measures.

Compare Hospitals

Unlike the doctor Ratings in this insert, our information on hospitals covers almost all of those in the state. But as with the doctors, the quality of the care varies widely, depending on which hospital you go to.

For example, six out of 20 rated hospitals in the San Francisco area received lower ratings for hip and knee replacement, and eight hospitals received one of our two highest ratings for those procedures.

In some cases, those hospitals are in the same neighborhood: St. Mary’s Medical Center - San Francisco received a top rating in hip and knee replacement, while other hospitals in the same neighborhood received lower ones. The same pattern is true for maternity care. In the Los Angeles area only five out of 55 hospitals received one of the two highest ratings for childbirth; 35 received a low rating.

“Hip and knee surgery is rarely an emergency, and pregnant women usually have months to decide where they want to deliver their baby” says Orly Avitzur, M.D., Consumer Reports’ medical director. “So you should have plenty of time to use this information together with other resources to choose the hospital that is best for you and your family”

Our Ratings of California hospitals are not included in this insert but are available free at ConsumerReports.org/cahealthcarecompare.

WHERE TO GET THE INFO YOU NEED

1 For Doctor Information

Use the Ratings on the following pages of this insert for information on more than 180 doctor groups across California. And go to California’s Office of the Patient Advocate, at www.opa.ca.gov/pages/reportcard.aspx, for more on performance for the state’s doctor groups. For more on how to check up on your doctor, see our article “What You Don’t Know About Your Doctor Can Hurt You,” on page 30 of the May 2016 Consumer Reports magazine.

2 For Hospital Information

For detailed information on performance in hip and knee surgery, and maternity care, go to ConsumerReports.org/cahealthcarecompare. For additional information on hospital performance in the state and around the country, go to ConsumerReports.org/hospitalratings.

3 To Check on Costs

ConsumerReports.org/cahealthcarecompare can also help you estimate what you might have to pay for more than 100 conditions and procedures, depending on where you live in the state. Several health insurers also have online tools that allow you to estimate your out-of-pocket costs, depending on your provider and your insurance coverage. For links to those tools, go to ConsumerReports.org/healthcosttools.

Check on Cost, Too

Our information on healthcare costs, gathered from more than 10 million insurance claims filed in California over a three-year period, show that the amount insurance companies and patients paid for more than 100 medical conditions, from appendicitis to urinary tract infections, can vary tremendously depending on where you live.

For example, prices for cesarean sections are more than twice as high in some parts of the state than in others. In San Mateo County, health insurers paid doctors and hospitals, on average, almost \$34,000 for a C-section. But in Central San Joaquin, insurers paid doctors and hospitals only \$13,000.

The amount that you have to pay out of pocket for cesarean sections can vary as well. For example, in the Monterey Coast area patients paid, on average, more than \$3,000 out of pocket (and some people paid as much as \$13,000), and in the Sacramento Valley patients paid just \$152.

The pattern with knee replacements is similar. Insurers paid doctors and hospitals in San Francisco about \$50,000, on average, for the procedure. By comparison, in the Central San Joaquin area, insurers paid healthcare providers just \$21,000.

When it comes to out-of-pocket costs, people who had a knee replacement in Inyo and Mono counties paid an average of \$88, but in western Los Angeles County patients paid \$942, on average.

Why do those prices vary so much? Research suggests that it depends mostly on the negotiating power of the healthcare provider, which allows larger, more powerful groups to charge more.

“We hope that this information will set the stage for the public release of more detailed cost information, so consumers can easily see exactly how much they will have to pay in hospitals and doctor groups across the state,” Peter says.

Our information on the cost of healthcare in California is not included in this insert but is available free at ConsumerReports.org/cahealthcarecompare.

Consumer Reports’ work on hospitals and the cost of healthcare in California was funded by the California Department of Insurance.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE RATINGS?

These Ratings include information on more than 180 doctor groups in California that are affiliated with one or more of the state's 10 leading health maintenance organizations. The Ratings are published in conjunction with the Integrated Healthcare Association, a nonprofit organization that focuses on improving quality and lowering the cost of healthcare in California.

What Are the Groups Rated On?

The doctor groups are rated on three measures:

- 1. Cancer Screening** is based on the percentage of patients who are appropriately screened for colorectal cancer, breast cancer, and cervical cancer.
- 2. Diabetes Care** measures whether patients with diabetes are appropriately monitored for high blood sugar levels and kidney disease (a serious complication), and whether they have their blood sugar and blood pressure levels under control.
- 3. Back Pain** is based on the percentage of patients with lower-back pain who avoid unnecessary imaging tests, including X-rays, MRIs, and CT scans within 28 days of their diagnosis. Expert guidelines say people with lower-back pain don't need those tests, and unnecessary tests can needlessly expose patients to radiation and other risks.

The data come from information reported by health insurance plans and the doctor groups.

How Should I Use the Ratings?

If you belong to an HMO or are considering joining one, use these Ratings to see how doctor groups in your area fare. The measures might help you compare groups even if you don't need to be screened for cancer or suffer from back pain or diabetes, because how a group performs on those measures may indicate how well they provide care overall.

How Are the Scores Determined?

The Ratings are divided into four categories, with 4 being better. Top-rated groups are roughly in the top 10 percent of groups in the state. Those with a 3 are in the top half but not in the top 10 percent. Those with a 2 are in the bottom half but not the bottom 25 percent. Those with our lowest score are in roughly the bottom 25 percent. We publish Ratings only if we have enough data to provide statistically reliable results for at least two of the measures.

Where Can I Go for More Information?

An online version of these Ratings is available on the website for California's Office of the Patient Advocate, at www.opa.ca.gov/pages/reportcard.aspx. That site also has information on how well HMO doctor groups perform in other areas, such as providing pediatric care and measures of patients' experience, plus average amounts that patients and health plans pay for medical care.

SACRAMENTO/NORTH

Alpine	Placer
Amador	Plumas
Butte	Sacramento
Colusa	Shasta
Del Norte	Sierra
El Dorado	Siskiyou
Glenn	Solano
Humboldt	Sonoma
Lake	Sutter
Lassen	Tehama
Mendocino	Trinity
Modoc	Yolo
Napa	Yuba
Nevada	

CENTRAL VALLEY

Calaveras	Merced
Fresno	Mono
Inyo	San Benito
Kern	San Joaquin
Kings	Stanislaus
Madera	Tulare
Mariposa	Tuolumne

INLAND EMPIRE

Riverside
San Bernardino

SAN FRANCISCO/BAY AREA

Alameda
Contra Costa
Marin
San Francisco
San Mateo
Santa Clara

CENTRAL COAST

Monterey
San Luis Obispo
Santa Barbara
Santa Cruz
Ventura

ORANGE COUNTY

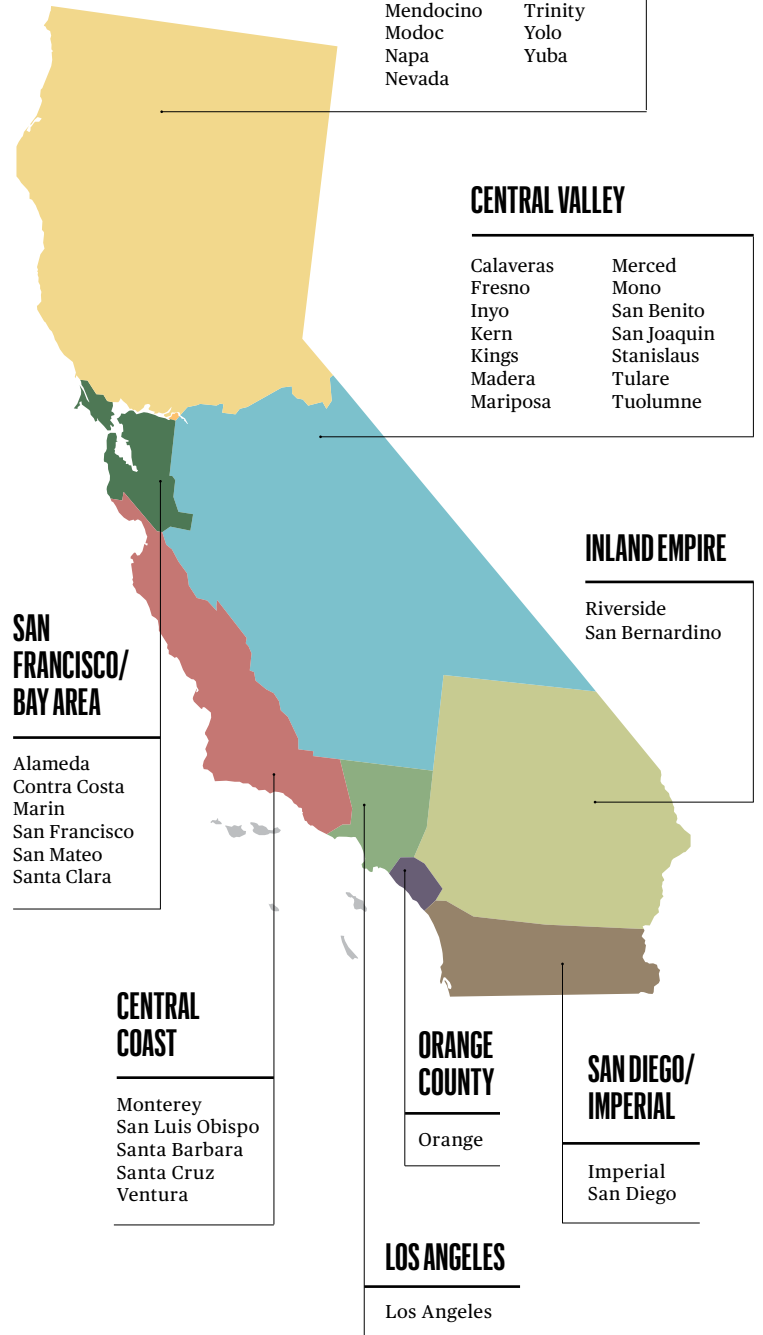
Orange

SAN DIEGO/IMPERIAL

Imperial
San Diego

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles





NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
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SACRAMENTO/NORTH

Hill Physicians Medical Group - Sacramento Region	3	3	3
Hill Physicians Medical Group - Solano Region	3	3	4
Humboldt IPA	3	1	3
John Muir Health	3	2	3
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Roseville/Sacramento Medical Centers	3	3	3
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - San Rafael Medical Center	4	4	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Santa Rosa Medical Center	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - South Sacramento Medical Center	3	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Vallejo/Vacaville Medical Centers	4	3	3
La Salle Medical Associates Inc.	1	2	-
Mercy Medical Group/Dignity Health Medical Foundation	3	3	3
Meritage Medical Network	3	2	3
NorthBay Medical Group	3	2	4
Sierra Nevada Medical Associates Inc.	2	2	2
Sutter Independent Physicians	3	3	3
Sutter Medical Group	3	3	3
Sutter Pacific Medical Foundation - Sutter Medical Group of the Redwoods	3	3	4
UC Davis Medical Group	3	3	3
Woodland Healthcare	3	3	3



BAY AREA

Affinity Medical Group	3	2	3
Alta Bates Medical Group, a division of Brown & Toland Physicians	3	2	3
Brown & Toland Physicians	3	2	3
Chinese Community Health Care Association	2	2	2
Hill Physicians Medical Group - Bay Region	3	3	3
Hill Physicians Medical Group - San Francisco Region	3	3	3
John Muir Health	3	2	3
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Diablo/Antioch Medical Centers	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Fremont/San Leandro Medical Centers	3	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Oakland/Richmond Medical Centers	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Redwood City Medical Center	4	4	4

NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
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BAY AREA continued

Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - San Francisco Medical Center	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - San Jose Medical Center	4	4	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - San Rafael Medical Center	4	4	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Santa Clara Medical Center	4	4	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - South San Francisco Medical Center	4	3	4
Meritage Medical Network	3	2	3
Palo Alto Medical Foundation - Mills-Peninsula Division/ Mills-Peninsula Medical Group	3	3	3
Palo Alto Medical Foundation - Palo Alto Foundation Medical Group	4	3	4
Physicians Medical Group of San Jose	3	3	3
San Jose Medical Group	3	3	3
Santa Clara County IPA (SCCIPA)	2	2	3
Sequoia Physicians Network	2	1	3
Sutter East Bay Medical Foundation	3	3	4
Sutter Pacific Medical Foundation - Sutter Medical Group of the Redwoods	3	3	4



CENTRAL COAST

Coastal Communities Physician Network	2	2	3
Facey Medical Group	3	3	3
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Woodland Hills	4	3	3
Lakeside Medical Organization	2	2	2
Palo Alto Medical Foundation - Palo Alto Foundation Medical Group	4	3	4
Physicians Choice Medical Group of San Luis Obispo	2	2	-
Physicians Choice Medical Group of Santa Maria	2	1	3
Physicians Medical Group of Santa Cruz	3	2	3
Regal Medical Group	2	2	3
Sansum Clinic	3	3	2
Santa Barbara Select IPA Medical Group	2	1	2
Seaview IPA	3	2	1
UCLA Medical Group	3	3	2
Valley Care IPA	3	2	4
Valley Care Select IPA	1	1	-



CENTRAL VALLEY

All Care IPA	3	2	2
Bakersfield Family Medical Center/ Heritage Physician Network	2	2	1



NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
CENTRAL VALLEY continued			
Central Valley Medical Group	3	1	-
Coastal Communities Physician Network	2	2	3
Golden Empire Medical Group	2	2	1
High Desert Medical Group	2	2	1
Hill Physicians Medical Group - San Joaquin Region	3	3	3
Hispanic Physicians IPA DBA Medico Hispano IPA	1	1	1
Independence Medical Group	1	1	-
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Kern County	3	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Fresno Medical Center	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - The Permanente Medical Group - Modesto/Manteca/Stockton Medical Centers	4	4	3
Key Medical Group	2	1	2
La Salle Medical Associates Inc.	1	2	-
Omni IPA Medical Group Inc. DBA Medcore Medical Group	2	2	3
Santé Community Physicians	3	2	2
Sutter Gould Medical Foundation	3	3	4
Visalia Medical Clinic	1	1	-



LOS ANGELES

Access Managed Care/ Access Medical Group	2	1	1
Accountable Healthcare IPA (aka Accountable Healthplan Medical)	1	1	3
Alamitos IPA	3	3	3
All Care Medical Group	1	2	-
Allied Pacific of California IPA	2	2	2
AltaMed Health Services	2	2	1
Angeles IPA	1	2	1
AppleCare Medical Group	2	2	1
AppleCare Medical Group St. Francis	2	2	4
Associated Hispanic Physicians of Southern CA	1	1	-
Axminster Medical Group	2	3	1
Bella Vista Medical Group IPA	1	1	-
Brookshire IPA	2	2	-
Cedars-Sinai Health Associates	3	3	3
Cedars-Sinai Medical Group	3	3	3
Centinela Valley IPA (formerly Robert Kennedy IPA)	1	2	-
Citrus Valley Physicians Group	2	2	1
Diamond Bar Medical Group (aka Greater Orange County MG)	1	1	-
Exceptional Care Medical Group	1	2	2
Facey Medical Group	3	3	3
Family Care Specialists IPA	3	2	2
Family Health Alliance	1	1	-

NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
LOS ANGELES continued			
Global Care Medical Group	1	1	-
Good Samaritan Medical Practice Association	1	2	1
Greater Covina Medical Group	2	2	2
Greater Newport Physicians	3	3	2
Healthcare L.A.	1	2	3
HealthCare Partners IPA	3	2	1
HealthCare Partners Medical Group	3	3	3
High Desert Medical Group	2	2	1
Hispanic Physicians IPA DBA Medico Hispano IPA	1	1	1
Inland Valleys IPA	1	1	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Antelope Valley	3	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Baldwin Park	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Downey	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Fontana	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Los Angeles	3	3	3
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Panorama City	4	3	3
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - South Bay	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - West Los Angeles	4	3	3
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Woodland Hills	4	3	3
Korean-American Medical Group	1	2	2
La Salle Medical Associates Inc.	1	2	-
Lakeside Medical Organization	2	2	2
Lakewood IPA	2	3	3
MemorialCare Medical Group	3	3	4
Nuestra Familia Medical Group Inc.	1	2	-
OmniCare Medical Group	1	2	-
Physician Associates of the Greater San Gabriel Valley	3	2	3
PIH Health Physicians - Group Division	3	3	3
PIH Health Physicians - IPA Division	3	1	1
Pioneer Medical Group	3	3	2
Premier Physicians Network	1	2	1
Prospect Health Source Medical Group	2	3	3
Prospect Medical Group	2	2	2
Prospect Northwest Orange County Medical Group	2	2	3
Prospect Professional Care Medical Group	2	2	2
Prudent Medical Group	1	2	-
Regal Medical Group	2	2	3
Seoul Medical Group	2	1	3
Serra Community Medical Clinic	1	1	-

NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
LOS ANGELES continued			
Sierra Medical Group	2	2	1
St. Jude Affiliated Physicians	3	2	1
St. Jude Heritage Medical Group	3	3	3
St. Mary IPA	2	2	3
St. Vincent IPA	1	2	2
Torrance Health IPA	2	2	1
UCLA Medical Group	3	3	2
UCLA Medical Group - Santa Monica Bay Physicians	3	2	3
Universal Care Medical Group	1	1	-



INLAND EMPIRE

Accountable Healthcare IPA (aka Accountable Healthplan Medical)	1	1	3
Alliance Desert Physicians	1	2	-
Beaver Medical Group	2	2	1
Choice Medical Group	3	3	4
Citrus Valley Physicians Group	2	2	1
Desert Oasis Healthcare	2	2	2
Desert Valley Medical Group Inc.	2	1	-
Dignity Health Medical Group - Inland Empire	1	2	1
Empire Physicians Medical Group	1	1	2
Family Practice Medical Group of San Bernardino Inc.	3	4	-
Hemet Community Medical Group	2	1	1
Heritage Victor Valley Medical Group	2	2	1
Hispanic Physicians IPA DBA Medico Hispano IPA	1	1	1
Inland Valleys IPA	1	1	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Fontana	4	3	4
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Riverside	3	3	3
La Salle Medical Associates Inc.	1	2	-
Lakeside Medical Organization	2	2	2
Loma Linda University Health Care	3	2	3
My Family Medical Group	1	1	1
Pinnacle Medical Group	1	2	3
Pomona Valley Medical Group Inc.	3	2	3
Premier Healthcare	2	2	2
PrimeCare	2	2	2
Redlands Yucaipa Medical Group	2	1	2
Regal Medical Group	2	2	3
Riverside Medical Clinic	3	3	3
Riverside Physician Network	1	2	1
San Bernardino Medical Group Inc.	3	3	1
Sharp Community Medical Group IPA	3	2	3
St. Mary High Desert Medical Group	2	3	2
Upland Medical Group Inc.	2	2	3

NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
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ORANGE COUNTY

Accountable Healthcare IPA (aka Accountable Healthplan Medical)	1	1	3
Affiliated Doctors of Orange County	2	3	2
Alamitos IPA	3	3	3
Allied Pacific of California IPA	2	2	2
AltaMed Health Services	2	2	1
AMVI Medical Group	2	3	4
Angeles IPA	1	2	1
AppleCare Medical Group	2	2	1
ARTA Health Network	1	2	2
Diamond Bar Medical Group (aka Greater Orange County MG)	1	1	-
Edinger Medical Group	3	4	3
Exceptional Care Medical Group	1	2	2
Family Choice Medical Group	1	3	-
Greater Newport Physicians	3	3	2
HealthCare Partners IPA	3	2	1
HealthCare Partners Medical Group	3	3	3
Hispanic Physicians IPA DBA Medico Hispano IPA	1	1	1
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - Orange County	4	3	4
Lakewood IPA	2	3	3
MemorialCare Medical Group	3	3	4
Mission Heritage Medical Group	2	3	3
Mission Hospital Affiliated Physicians	2	3	3
Monarch HealthCare	3	2	2
Noble AMA IPA	2	1	1
Pioneer Medical Group	3	3	2
Prospect Gateway Medical Group	2	2	2
Prospect Genesis Medical Group	2	2	3
Prospect Health Source Medical Group	2	3	3
Prospect Medical Group	2	2	2
Prospect Northwest Orange County Medical Group	2	2	3
Prospect Professional Care Medical Group	2	2	2
St. Joseph Heritage Medical Group	3	3	4
St. Joseph Hospital Affiliated Physicians	3	2	2
St. Jude Affiliated Physicians	3	2	1
St. Jude Heritage Medical Group	3	3	3



SAN DIEGO / IMPERIAL

Arch Health Partners	3	3	3
Encompass Medical Group	2	2	-
Greater Tri-Cities IPA	2	1	2
Imperial County Physicians Med Group	2	2	1



NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
SAN DIEGO / IMPERIAL continued			
Kaiser Permanente - Southern California Permanente Medical Group - San Diego	3	3	4
Mercy Physicians Medical Group	3	2	3
Mid County Physicians Medical Group	2	2	1
MultiCultural Medical Group Inc.	2	2	1
Primary Care Associates Medical Group	2	2	3

NAME	CANCER SCREENING	DIABETES CARE	BACK PAIN
SAN DIEGO / IMPERIAL continued			
Scripps Clinic Medical Group	3	3	1
Scripps Coastal Medical Center	3	3	2
Scripps Physicians Medical Group	2	2	2
Sharp Community Medical Group IPA	3	2	3
Sharp Rees-Stealy Medical Group	3	4	3
UC San Diego Health	3	3	3

6 STEPS TO WORKING BETTER WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Here's how to work better with your doctor:

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 computer screen. Or she sticks to a checklist of yes-or-no questions that makes it hard for you to cover all of your 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 Decides Without Your Input**

Your doctor should discuss the pros and cons of treatment options, then help you make an informed

choice. That shared decision-making 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. **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 strategy: Ask for some time to think about his suggestions, so you can do some research.

PROBLEM 3 **Your Doctor Discourages Second Opinions**

Second opinions aren't needed for everyday concerns, but if you're facing a serious condition, a diagnosis is unclear, the condition is rare, or a course of treatment isn't straightforward or may be risky, having someone else weigh in is wise. You may feel uncomfortable second-guessing your doctor, but 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 to avoid duplicate tests. Insurance usually covers second (and even third) opinions, but double-check before you go.

PROBLEM 4 **The Doctor's Office Is Disorganized**

Maybe the doctor's office doesn't return calls in a timely way, 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 have a staff member update patients on wait times every 20 minutes, for instance. Or ask the receptionist or office manager how to best communicate with the office—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, and that 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 side effects of a medication or procedure, or may be uncomfortable about sharing bad news. Though some of us may 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.