



Highlights: Top Doctors

Bay Area Consumers' Checkbook, available at www.checkbook.org, gives area consumers critical information to help them get top-quality medical care. In its latest issue, Checkbook provides a list of the area physicians, practicing in 38 specialty fields, most frequently recommended by other doctors.

Checkbook surveyed all actively practicing doctors in the Bay Area. Each doctor was asked to identify physicians he or she "would consider most desirable for care of a loved one." Doctors could recommend one or two physicians in each of the specialties. Checkbook's list reports which physicians were recommended most often, and how many doctors recommended each specialist. While there is an obvious risk of physicians' biases, friendships, etc., impacting a survey of this kind, Checkbook's research has found that doctors mentioned by enough other doctors to be included in this list:

- Did not get there by chance alone. For most specialties, even the small number of mentions some of the listed physicians received from their peers would have been very unlikely to have occurred if the doctors responding to the survey had just been randomly naming other doctors.
- Get much higher ratings than other doctors in Checkbook's rigorous surveys of patients.
- Are much more likely than other doctors to be board certified.
- Are less likely than other doctors to have disciplinary actions filed against them with state medical boards.
- For the specialties for which Checkbook has surgical outcomes data, have better results.

Whichever doctor you select, how you interact with him or her will have a big effect on the success of your care. Checkbook offers the following suggestions:

- Be sure your doctor takes a thorough medical history. If you think your doctor has not asked about something important, volunteer that information.
- Find out about the tests your doctor proposes to do. There is a lot of debate in the medical field about which routine tests are worth doing and how often. Discuss necessity and effectiveness of the tests with your doctor, and visit www.choosingwisely.org, which provides data for physicians and patients.
- Be sure you are informed of the results of tests, exams, and treatments. Ask when results will be available and how you will be notified of them. Doctors are increasingly allowing patients to access records electronically, but many doctors still call patients with results.
- Discuss the results of tests and exams. Ask the doctor to compare findings from new tests and exams to previous ones, and ask whether you can make changes to improve results.
- Prepare for appointments. Make a list of symptoms, questions, and what treatments you have been giving yourself or other providers have been giving you. If you take several medications, bring them. Take notes, and consider bringing a friend or relative to help ask your questions and document replies.
- Describe symptoms in detail. Also, if you think you might have a specific condition, tell your doctor.
- Ask for a full explanation of your diagnosis, treatment options, and outlook for recovery. How sure is the doctor of the diagnosis? What are treatment options? How about risks and costs?
- Ask about referrals to specialists. Ask why a particular specialist was chosen, and research other specialists and ask the doctor to compare the options with you.
- Ask about medication. What are benefits and possible side effects?
- Ask about hospitalization. Hospitals are dangerous places. Checkbook.org has comprehensive ratings of U.S. hospitals. Check them and ask your doctor about your options.
- Get second opinions. If your doctor recommends hospitalization or other expensive, risky, or burdensome treatment, ask for another (ideally completely independent) doctor to weigh in.

Checkbook's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.