

A doctor to call your own

Big benefits come with long-term partnerships



OFFICE VISITS

Family physician Debra Gore, MD, with patient Anna Halloran at Riverfront Medical Center in Spokane.

There are plenty of ways to get care in a hurry when you don't have time to schedule a visit with your primary care doctor. But finding a doctor you like, and seeing them for most of your health issues, has some significant benefits too, as Sam Gibson Jr. and Anna Halloran point out.

At the Port Orchard Medical Center, family physician Ginny Sugimoto, MD, has been 49-year-old Gibson's doctor for about 10 years, and he chuckles when he says that she's seen him through "a few" health challenges: severe peripheral neuropathy, respiratory failure, paralysis, and high blood pressure.

"I had respiratory failure in 2009 and was on life support for about 10 days," he says. "When I got out of the hospital I was paralyzed on one side of my body and was in a lot of pain. But Dr. Sugimoto really went the extra mile to help me recover and get back to a more healthy and comfortable life."

History helps ensure holistic care

Gibson says he might go in to see Dr. Sugimoto for the flu, but because she knows him and his health history, she's on the lookout for other issues—things he's not even aware of.

"She might order a blood test to check one thing, but she also checks the results for other issues. If my blood pressure is too high, she asks what I was doing that morning or the day before. She knows about my

personal life and my stressors, so she can treat the whole me. That's a huge benefit."

Dr. Sugimoto says the continuity that comes from long-term doctor/patient relationships helps her keep her patients healthier and safer.

"I know what you look like when you're well, so I recognize when you're sick," she says. "And, because we've developed a trusting relationship over time, our shared decision making is more likely to result in care that really meets your personal needs."

On the other side of Washington state, Anna Halloran, a 32-year-old mom in Spokane, has had health coverage through Group Health since she was a teenager, and has been cared for by family physician Debra Gore, MD, at Riverfront Medical Center, for about 4 years. "I switched my whole family to Dr. Gore when my daughter was born, and now she also cares for our 1-year-old son," she says.

"Dr. Gore knows all of us, including our health history, our lifestyle, and what's important to us," Halloran says. "Luckily we haven't had any serious health issues, but she handles all our preventive care and just treated my son for a series of ear infections."

Clinic office visits offer added convenience

Halloran's family lived in Moscow, Idaho, when she was a teenager, where there wasn't a Group Health Medical Centers clinic nearby. Since moving to Spokane a decade ago, she's come to depend on the one-stop shopping that the clinics provide.

"I love having office visits, the pharmacy, and lab in one location, and the online services like scheduling appointments, emailing my doctor, and checking on my kids' immunizations are really convenient."

Gibson seconds Halloran's appreciation for the care he receives at his Group Health Medical Centers clinic. "It's so convenient to be able to pick up a prescription after an office visit. Or sometimes Dr. Sugimoto orders lab work or an X-ray in the middle of a visit. I go get the test done, come back to her office, and she already has the results. We can continue our visit with the added information—no lag time, no second visit, and I'm able to get answers right away." —Ginny Smith

Ready to choose a doctor?

A great way to get started is to go to ghc.org, click on "Get started," and watch our "Choosing a doctor" video. It walks you through the process of finding a doctor and making your selection online.

"The best way to have your selection become immediately effective is to call Customer Service and let us know which provider you've chosen," says Mariah Rogers, a customer service specialist. "Remember that you can change providers any time, for any reason. And Customer Service is always here to answer your questions and help you navigate the system."

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PHARMACY



LAB



ONLINE



EMAIL

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—Anna Halloran, Spokane member

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