

MEDICAL BRIEFS

Depression Workshop

The University of Michigan Depression Center will present an education workshop for people with depression and their family members over the age of 12 6-8 p.m. Monday, March 18 at the U-M Health System's East Ann Arbor Health Center on Plymouth Road.

The workshop will offer patients and families an opportunity to learn about depression and gather information about its risk factors, treatments, and impact on families, as well as healthful ways of interacting with each other. It will highlight the most important facts about depression and its effect on people of different ages.

Multi-generational education materials will be provided, and open discussions will be facilitated at the end of the session. Please call (734) 764-0267 to register. The workshop fee is \$25 per person or \$30 per family. Future workshops will be held on May 20 and June 24 at the same location.

Hives and asthma study

Physicians at The Michigan Respiratory Health and Research Institute in Novi are seeking volunteers for the following studies:

■ **FDA-approved antihistamine** for adolescents and adults age 12 and above. Volunteer study subjects must have at least six weeks of hives/urticaria (itchy, blotchy skin eruptions) active for at least the past three weeks.

■ **Intestigational medication** for adults and adolescents age 12 years and above. Volunteer study subjects must be healthy, nonsmokers with moderate asthma symptoms (cough, wheeze, shortness of breath) controlled by inhaled medications.

Individuals who qualify receive study-related office visits, limited testing and investigational study medications at no cost, plus compensation for participation in study. For more information, call Julie at (248) 437-6400 or (800) 326-5969.

American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is recruiting volunteers for its Road to Recovery program. Volunteers help to drive cancer patients to and from their treatment at Henry Ford Hospital in downtown Detroit. All volunteers need is a reliable means of transportation and a few hours during the week.

"Sadly, patients everyday are canceling and postponing their cancer treatment simply because they do not have a ride," said Jessica Pott, Quality of Life director, American Cancer Society. "Right here in the metro-Detroit area, 10-20 percent of newly diagnosed cancer patients are not getting the treatment they need simply because they do not have transportation. It is our job to help them get back on the road to recovery."

To learn more, call the American Cancer Society at (248) 557-5353.

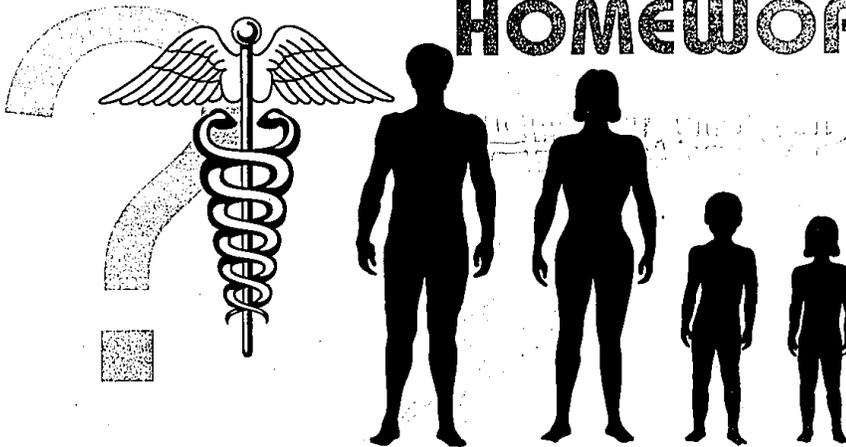
We want your health news

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer newsworthy information including Medical Desk (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsmakers (appointments/new hires in the medical field), and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies). We also welcome newsworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories.

To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

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CHOOSING A PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN REQUIRES HOMEWORK



BY RENEE SKOGLUND
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You wouldn't think of going on a job interview without first having checked out the performance rating of the company. You wouldn't take a CPA exam without having put in hours of study. And when it comes to renewing your driver's license, you're apt to glance at the booklet beforehand.

So why would you fail to do your homework before choosing a primary care physician?

"I don't think we've really done a good job of telling people what a primary care physician is and why they're necessary," said Dr. Bruce Deschere, faculty member, Department of Family Medicine, Wayne State University.

The primary care physician is often the most important medical person in a patient's life. He or she is the gateway to specialists and hospital care. Currently, most managed health care plans recognize four types of primary care doctors:

■ **Family practice physician:** Treats the overall health of individuals and their families from "cradle to grave." "The family practitioner is intended to be the one physician you could put into a small town and

everybody could see him," said Deschere, who is president of WSU's University Physician Services, Inc. The family practice physician may have extensive experience in managing a particular condition, such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

■ **Internist:** Provides general health care for the adult, from teenagers through seniors. He or she may specialize in treating heart, lung, blood or other disorders. "They view it as an avenue to specialization," said Deschere.

■ **Obstetrician/gynecologist:** Specializes in treating women's health issues, as well as providing routine physicals and health screenings. Not all health plans, or states, allow you to choose OB/GYN as your primary care physician. Michigan does not.

■ **Pediatrician:** Provides primary care for children, usually from infancy through the teen years.

Your primary care doctor may either be an M.D. (medical doctor) or a D.O. (osteopathic doctor). Both have completed medical school and post-graduate residency programs. If you need to see a specialist, such as a cardiologist, your primary care physician will provide you with a referral and manage your overall health in conjunction with the specialist.

Selecting your physician

Here's where your homework begins. Insurance may be a factor, with managed care plans offering a directory of providers.

"That's a horrible way to pick a physician," said Dr. Sean P. Coyle, a family practitioner on staff at St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia. "People will look at the first name

that sounds similar to their ethnic heritage. I've had patients say, 'Yours is the first Irish name I saw.' It's like a pig in a poke, like buying a car through the used car ads without seeing it."

The solution? "The best way to choose your primary care physician is through another patient or a doctor that you know," said Coyle.

Assess your own medical needs in choosing a primary care physician. Do you have a chronic disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis. If so, a general internist may be more inclined to treat the disease due to training.

If you select a family practitioner, ask him or her: "Do you feel comfortable treating this?" said Deschere.

Some patients consider it important to choose a doctor based on age. A patient may believe an older doctor has more experience

than a younger doctor is more aware of the latest medical research and procedures. Coil said some elderly patients prefer a younger doctor for a very practical reason:

"They think he or she will outlive them. They've already lost a few doctors. Elderly patients are afraid the doctor won't outlive them."

Gender may be another factor. "Women often feel comfortable in talking all their issues to their OB/GYN," said Deschere.

Board certification

Board eligible and board certified medical professionals have additional training in a particular area of medicine. If board certified, that provider has passed examinations designed to test in-depth knowledge of that specialty, according to the University of Michigan Health System.



Dr. Sean P. Coyle

(To find out if a physician is board certified, visit the Web site for the American Board of Medical Specialties, www.abms.org)

Judging a doctor's performance by the lack of complaints made against him or her is not the best gauge for competence. Complaints can be unreliable and misleading, said Deschere. Neurosurgeons, for instance, are in a dangerous profession with high stakes.

"These physicians may get sued two or three times a year. That doesn't mean they are bad physicians. It's just a high-risk area."

Making an appointment

Make your first appointment with a new doctor when you're well. This gives the physician a chance to know your medical history and your personality: Are you an "alarmist" prone to frequent doctor visits or a "wait until I'm dying" type. It makes a difference.

"The worst time to meet a physician is when you're sick," said Coyle. "When you see a physician for the first time when you're sick, they're focusing on your illness and not on the whole you."

Competence is foremost in choosing a doctor.

Please see HOMEWORK, C7



Dr. Bruce Deschere

Program promotes 'buddy system' for mammograms

Saint Joseph Mercy Health System of Ann Arbor (SJMHHS) will once again collaborate with Power, Inc. on an educational program designed to encourage women to support one another through the mammography process.

Womankind is a mammogram educational program that encourages women to choose a friend or loved one to become "buddies," with the idea that they schedule their appointment on the same day at the same time slot and go through the process together. They could then plan an enjoyable activity to do before or after their screening, such as lunch, going to a movie or shopping. The goal is to make yearly mammograms an annual "tradition." SJMHHS will support the program by providing "buddy slots" so women can schedule their mammograms in the same time slot.

"We believe the buddy system is a

unique approach to get women to take charge of their health and get that important annual screening," says Marilyn Harris, Breast Health Specialist at SJMHHS. "It also de-mystifies the process because you go through it with someone you know, love and trust who can provide personal support."

It is recommended that all women age 40 and older have a mammogram every year.

SJMHHS and Power Inc. will hold a special information session for women interested in the educational program to learn more about it. The session will be held Thursday, March 14 from 5-8 p.m. in the Education Center at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital.

In addition to information on Womankind, there will be gifts and refreshments. Information will also be available regarding programs for those without health insurance.

Reservations are preferred but walk-ins are welcome for the information session. Free childcare will be available for the information session. However, those interested in free childcare should call to make reservations and include the number of children requiring care and their ages.

For reservations or for more information about the Womankind Buddy Mammogram Educational Program, please call (800) 231-2211.

Power Inc. is a faith-based community development corporation located in Ann Arbor that focuses on women's and children's health care issues. Saint Joseph Mercy Health System and its physicians provide a comprehensive range of health care services to residents in Washtenaw, Livingston, western Wayne, Jackson, Lenawee and Monroe counties.

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Marilyn Harris
Breast Health Specialist,
SJMHHS