

## Open Enrollment: Time to Choose

By Jackie Carr | August 31, 2018

**E**veryday we make choices. Big and small. Choosing your health care provider is a big choice. It helps determine who you see for everyday health concerns and perhaps specialists in the future. Once you decide what you can afford financially, such as health plan premiums and out-of-pocket costs, look deeper into what health plans offer based on your age, overall health and the needs of your family. Here are eight things to consider during open enrollment:

### Location, location, location

Does the medical plan provide health care within 20 minutes of your home? Look at a map and determine if the hospital and doctors in your plan are within manageable distance from your home or workplace. Choose a health provider that offers [Express Care and Urgent Care as well as Emergency Care](#). The ideal health care provider will have [locations](#) available throughout your community to care for you and your family.

### Wide Selection of Primary Care Doctors



Good health begins with good [primary care](#). Choose a medical plan that offers a wide selection of

ed primary care doctors. Something to consider: Primary care physicians often have specialized training or approaches to care. Depending on your age or that of your spouse or child, you may want an internist, a pediatrician or a geriatrician. Some patients want a family medicine doctor to care for everyone, infants to grandparents. Perhaps you want a doctor fluent in a specific language or a doctor who is identified as LGBTQ-friendly. Look for a primary care team that is able to include nurses, pharmacists, marriage and family therapists and sports medicine specialists. The right health system for you should offer [all of these options](#).

## **Scheduling Options**

Most of us [schedule doctor visits](#) over the phone. But increasingly, there are other options, including online or with a mobile phone application. Check to see if your potential provider offers the ability to use these alternatives. Ideally, you should be able to make appointments in-person, over the phone and online. Some health systems offer a time-saving feature called "Save My Spot." It allows patients to remotely hold their spot in advance for same-day walk-in visits for Express and Urgent Care. When you arrive for your appointment, your space in line is saved, and you are typically seen within minutes.

## **Linked Medical Records**

Most patients assume all of their medical records are linked within one health system. This is not always the case. Sometimes hospitals and physicians use a different medical record system for every location, and the systems are not interconnected. Technologically advanced hospitals link all medical records electronically so that health care providers can communicate critical information accurately and efficiently, whether a patient receives care inside a clinic or hospital. With one medical record, your doctors, nurses and pharmacists all know what care you are receiving so that health care decisions are made safely and fully informed. One medical record is also the ideal way to manage referrals, transitions of care and electronic consultations with specialists. Look for a hospital that is officially designated as, "[Most Wired](#)."

## **Access to National Experts**

If you have been diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease or cancer, you may need advanced care from a medical or surgical specialist. Many patients look to medical centers associated with top universities for this type of complex, sophisticated care. These specialized health systems offer multidisciplinary teams of experts who have access to medical and surgical resources not typically offered in other settings. If you choose the route of academic medicine, look for health system that includes a National Institute of Health-designated [Comprehensive Cancer Center](#). These cancer centers offer superior survival and recovery rates due to the fullness of care, diverse medical, surgical, and radiation oncology disciplines, subspecialty expertise and early access to novel therapies, such as immunotherapy.

## Your Medical Record, Your Notes

Ever wonder what your doctor writes about your office visit? When choosing a health plan, consider a provider that enables you to see and read your doctor's [signed medical notes](#). These progress notes are helpful to patients with complicated medical histories to recall the details of individual visits. If a caregiver is unable to attend an appointment, the notes can be shared. The notes may also offer an in-depth analysis of lab and radiology results. This move toward greater transparency is part of an international trend to make patients feel more in control of their health care. Typically, the notes can be accessed through an online patient portal dubbed, "MyChart [↗](#)." In addition to seeing notes, patients can use these portals to track medical histories, prescriptions and lab or radiology results, and make appointments for everything from urgent care visits to mammograms.

## Be a Secret Shopper

If you are wondering what a health system is really like, [explore their website](#) and visit their clinic and hospital facilities. What is the signage and parking like? How are you greeted as you walk through the doors? The ideal health system will have employees who smile and make eye contact and are happy to stop and answer your questions. One of the most telling tests is to simply call the health system of your choice and see if you can get an appointment. Are you put on hold? If yes, for how long? Did you ultimately speak to someone friendly and helpful? Choose a health system that treats you with attentive kindness and respect.

## Make the Switch

Ready to switch your health plan? Or add new family members? The process of moving to a new provider will vary, depending on whether you are getting insurance through your employer, Covered California or Medicare. UC San Diego Health has more than 800 extraordinary primary care and specialty physicians to choose from. Convenient locations. Top technologies. Academic medicine. And a team who can't wait to care for you. To learn how you can switch to UC San Diego Health, visit [health.ucsd.edu/patients/billing/insurance/Pages/open-enrollment](https://health.ucsd.edu/patients/billing/insurance/Pages/open-enrollment)

---

### To learn more about the featured medical specialties, please visit:

- → [Cancer Services](#)
  - → [Surgical Services](#)
  - → [Primary Care](#)
-