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How to Find a Psychiatrist

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My office receives 10-20 phone calls per day from people needing assistance in finding a psychiatrist. Many inquirers have become intrigued by the promise of modern psychopharmacology but are wary of inappropriate or unethical usages of this technology. Thus many patients are concerned about someone having technical competence along with personal ethics, integrity, and cultural/religious sensitivity. Some have been frustrated by previous attempts to get help. They all are in great need for direction on how to find a competent, ethical, compassionate psychiatrist with a good “bedside manner”. We will seek to give some direction, while acknowledging that there are other disciplines (primary care physicians, pediatricians, gynecologists, advanced nurse practitioners, psychologists and physicians assistants) that are involved in psychopharmacological decisions. However the questions are always about psychiatrists – though the concepts noted below will apply to the other disciplines.

It is absolutely critical that any patient assume an active role in finding any type of doctor. You must “ask, seek and knock” to insure that your interests are well served. Ask friends, pastors, local pharmacists, psychologists and therapists for recommendations for a psychiatrist in your community. Seek advice from your primary care doctor or gynecologists about the reputations of prospective doctors. The key question is who the physician would send a family member to for psychiatric services in your community. Pharmaceutical representatives and staff members of doctor’s offices or hospital emergency rooms can be a valuable source of information. Let your fingers do the seeking through the yellow pages by soliciting advice from county medical societies, United Way agencies, counseling centers and medical school departments of psychiatry. Local community mental health centers usually have at least one psychiatrist on staff but can also give direction about practitioners in the community. Your insurance company will have data available about psychiatric specialists that are “in network” for your plan – thus reducing the cost obligation that you would have. Ask all of these sources about reputation, board certifications, areas of expertise and the availability of the doctor. The later is important for it does not matter if the doctor is very talented if he/she does not have time to see you in a timely fashion or return phone calls. Knock on the cyber doors of professional organizations or support groups that offer referral assistance. The following are examples of these resources. You can visit the websites for information or attend a support group and poll the attendees about good psychiatrists.

American Association of Christian Counselors (www.AACC.net) – Resources link
Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance (www.DBSAlliance.org)- Empower yourself link
National Mental Health Association (www.mentalhealthamerica.net) – Help link
American Psychiatric Association (www.healthyminds.org) – Locate a psychiatrist link
Christian Medical and Dental Association (www.cmdahome.org)- Doctor search link
Am. Ass.of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (www.aacap.org) –Psychiatrist finder link
Anxiety Disorders (www.freedomfromfear.org) – Finding help/resources link
Am. Academy of Addiction Psychiatry (www.aaap.org) – Patient referral link
National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org) –Find Support link(Info. Helpline)
Children and Adults with ADHD (www.chadd.org) – Finding support link
Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org) – In my community link

Once you have found someone, make the most of your consultation. Arrive early to complete the paperwork. Get copies of relevant medical records detailing previous treatment and bring with you or have sent prior to your arrival. Make a written timeline of your problem with a list of the specific symptoms that have caused you the most impairment. Write down the questions and concerns that you have AND bring them with you. Take notes and ask questions if you are not clear about something. Obtain a written copy of office policies regarding insurance, payment, phone calls, prior authorizations, refill requests and emergency procedures prior to your appointment. Study those and ask any relevant questions prior to or during your appointment. Make sure that you are clear about what is being treated and for how long the treatment will occur. Then follow the treatment plan and keep your follow-up appointments.