

How To Choose a Pharmacy

By Mike Dunn

When choosing a pharmacy for your family, there should be other considerations aside from a convenient location or even cost. After all, there is much at stake in selecting the right pharmacy and the right pharmacist. This is a person that you, your spouse and your children may be dealing with for many years.

Your pharmacist, first and foremost, should be someone you know and trust. According to the apharmacist.org Web site, you should give as much consideration to choosing your pharmacist as you do to choosing a doctor. Pharmacists are health care professionals specializing in medicines and their appropriate use. Because of this, your pharmacist plays an important role in your personal health care and the health care of your family.

The importance of assessing personal service in selecting a pharmacist is considered critical by most patients. In that regard, here are some questions to ponder:

- How accessible is the pharmacist?
- Is he or she easy to talk to and willing to hear your concerns?
- During what hours is the pharmacist available to answer your questions?

It is important to choose one pharmacist with whom you can establish an ongoing relationship. Also, by choosing one pharmacy, a complete record of the medicines you take is in one place, making them easier to coordinate and manage. Your pharmacist can alert you to possible drug interactions - particularly if you take a number of different medications - help you track refills on important prescriptions, and provide any necessary detail on short notice.

It is wise to consider your entire family's pharmacy needs. Often, a pharmacist can help you with special circumstances, such as when you are taking care of an elderly relative. If you have aging parents that live nearby, you might ask, for example, if it is possible to deliver prescriptions to their home and send the bill to you.

Not all pharmacists and/or pharmacies provide the same services. All pharmacies are required to meet minimum standards. Most, however, offer services and conveniences beyond the minimum requirements. When choosing a pharmacist and/or pharmacy, you should evaluate your needs and make a selection to meet those needs.

Here are some other suggested questions to consider:

Does the pharmacist take time to answer your questions in a manner that you understand?

Is the pharmacy open during hours that fit your schedule?

Does the pharmacy deliver? If so, are there restrictions or additional charges?

If there is an emergency, does the pharmacy provide after-hours service or a special emergency telephone number?

Are charge accounts available?

Does the pharmacy handle the drugs you expect to be taking?

There may be a higher cost for additional services or conveniences such as delivery, charge accounts, and emergency service. Real value, however, comes not only from the price of your prescriptions, but from having your specific needs met at a fair price.

It is also very helpful to become thoroughly familiar with your insurance benefits as they concern your prescriptions. For example, some prescription benefits plans will only pay for the dispensing of a certain days supply of your medication. If your physician issues a prescription for a larger supply of medication, the pharmacy will have to decrease your quantity dispensed or your insurance company will not pay for the medication.

Obviously, since your physician is issuing the prescriptions, it is important to advise your physician concerning any prescription restrictions under your prescription benefits plan.

Not every pharmacy will accept your prescription drug card. A pharmacy must sign a contract to provide services for each prescription benefit plan. The owner of the pharmacy must review each contract and decide which insurance plans the pharmacy will accept. If the pharmacy does not accept your prescription card, the pharmacy probably does not have a signed contract with your health insurance provider. In some cases, pharmacy owners may take steps to add your prescription benefit plan if asked to do so.

Once you weigh all the factors and choose a pharmacy, it is strongly recommended that you use this pharmacy for all of your prescriptions needs. This allows you to receive the greatest benefit from the "screening" for drug interactions, etc., by your pharmacist since this one pharmacy has all of your prescription drug records.