



## Consumer Health Decisions # 2

### Types of Healthcare Providers

When you are faced with the decision of having to select a new health care provider, your head may spin at all the different types of providers. Here we will take a look at some common types of healthcare providers.

#### Physicians

The most well-known healthcare provider is called a “physician.” A physician is usually found in a medical setting, such as a hospital or clinic. There are two types of physicians:

- MD (Medical Doctor)
- DO (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine or Osteopath)

Both MD’s and DO’s can serve as a **general practitioner**, which is the type of doctor you see on a regular basis, and both could also be a **specialist**, such as a cardiologist, radiologist, or urologist. MD’s and DO’s have equivalent education and training; however, DO’s tend to emphasize the body’s ability to “heal itself” and may use alternative types of treatments.

#### Mid-Level Practitioners

Other well-known types of healthcare providers are called Mid-Level Practitioners. They receive a Masters Degree and practice under the supervision of a physician. These may include:

- PA (Physician Assistant)
- NP (Nurse Practitioner)

In Wisconsin, both PA’s and NP’s can prescribe medicine.

#### Other Healthcare Providers

There are numerous additional healthcare providers, including:

- Pharmacists (RPh or PharmD)
- Optometrists (OD)
- Physical Therapists (PT)
- Chiropractors (DC)
- Registered Nurses (RN)
- Psychologists (PhD)
- Registered Dietitians (RD)
- Dentists (DDS)

Each type of healthcare provider has a **scope of practice**, which means he or she has received education, training, and experience in a specific area of healthcare. For instance, it would be beyond the scope of practice for a dentist to diagnose or treat mental illness; however, that would fall within the scope of practice for a psychologist. There are federal and state guidelines that define each provider’s scope of practice.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What types of healthcare providers have you been to? What do you think the *scope of practice* for those providers would include?
2. What is the difference between a physician who is a *general practitioner* and a physician who is a *specialist*?