



GENERAL DEFINITIONS

Doctors of Medicine (MD): use all accepted methods of medical care. They treat diseases and injuries, provide preventive care, do routine checkups, prescribe drugs, and do some surgery. MDs complete medical school plus three to seven years of graduate medical education. They must be licensed by the state in which they practice.

Doctors of osteopathic medicine (DO): provide general health care to individuals and families. The training osteopaths receive is similar to that of an MD. In addition to treating patients with drugs, surgery, and other treatments, a DO may emphasize movement in treating problems of muscles, bones, and joints.

Family practitioners: are MDs or DOs who specialize in providing comprehensive, continuous health care for all family members, regardless of age or sex.

Geriatricians: are physicians with special training in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disorders in older people. Geriatric medicine recognizes aging as a normal process, not a disease state.

Internists (MD or DO): specialize in the diagnosis and medical treatment of diseases in adults. Internists do not perform surgery or deliver babies.

Surgeons: treat diseases, injuries, or deformities by operating on the body. A general surgeon is qualified to perform many common operations, but many specialize in one area of the body: for example, neurosurgeons treat disorders relating to the nervous system, spinal cord, and brain; orthopedic surgeons treat disorders of the bones, joints, muscles, ligaments, and tendons; and thoracic surgeons treat disorders related to the chest.

SPECIALISTS

Cardiologist: a heart specialist

Dermatologist: a skin specialist

Endocrinologist: a specialist in diseases of the digestive tract

Gastroenterologist: a specialist in diseases of the digestive tract

Gynecologist: a specialist in the female reproductive system

Hematologist: a specialist in the function and diseases of the kidneys

Neurologist: a specialist in disorders of the nervous system

Oncologist: a specialist in diseases of the ear, nose, and throat

Physiatrist: a specialist in physical medicine and rehabilitation

Psychiatrist: a specialist in mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders

Pulmonary specialist: a physician who treats disorders of the lungs and chest

Rheumatologist: a specialist in arthritis and rheumatism

Urologist: a specialist in the urinary system in both sexes and the male reproductive system

DENTAL CARE

Dentists (DDS or DMD) treat oral conditions such as gum disease and tooth decay. They do regular checkups, give routine dental and preventive care, fill cavities, remove teeth, provide dentures, and check for cancers in the mouth. Dentists can prescribe medication and perform oral surgery. A general dentist might refer patients to a specialist such as an **oral surgeon**, who does difficult tooth removals and surgery on the jaw; an **endodontist**, who is an expert on root canals; a **periodontist**, who is knowledgeable about gum diseases; or a dentist who specializes in geriatrics. Medicare will not pay for any dental care except for surgery on the jaw or facial bones.

EYE CARE

Ophthalmologists (MD or DO) specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases. They also prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses. Ophthalmologists can prescribe drugs and perform surgery. They often treat older people who have glaucoma and cataracts.

Optometrists (OD) generally have a bachelor's degree plus four years of graduate training in a school of optometry. They are trained to diagnose eye abnormalities and prescribe, supply, and adjust eyeglasses and contact lenses. In most states, optometrists can use drugs to diagnose eye disorders. An optometrist may refer patients to an ophthalmologist or other medical specialist in cases requiring medication or surgery.

Opticians fit, supply, and adjust eyeglasses and contact lenses that have been prescribed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist. They cannot examine or test the eyes or prescribe glasses or drugs. Opticians are licensed in 22 states and may have formal training. Traditionally, most opticians are trained on the job.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Psychiatrists (MD or DO) treat people with mental and emotional difficulties. They can prescribe medication and counsel patients as well as perform diagnostic tests to determine if there are physical problems.

Psychologists (PhD, PsyD, or EdD) are health care professionals trained and licensed to assess, diagnose, and treat people with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders. Psychologists counsel people through individual, group, or family therapy.

NURSING CARE

Registered nurses (RN) may have two, three, or four years of education in a nursing school. In addition to giving medicine, administering treatments, and educating patients, RNs also work in physicians' offices, clinics, and community health agencies.

Nurse practitioners (RN, NP) are registered nurses with training beyond basic nursing education. They perform physical examinations and diagnostic tests, counsel patients, and develop treatment programs. Nurse practitioners may work independently, such as in rural clinics, or may be staff members at hospitals and other health facilities. They are educated in a number of specialties, including gerontological nursing.

Licensed practical nurses (LPN) have 12 to 18 months of training and are most frequently found in hospitals and long-term care facilities where they provide much of the routine nursing patient care. They also assist physicians and registered nurses.

REHABILITATIVE CARE

Audiologists are concerned with hearing disorders, test and evaluate patients and provide treatment to restore as much normal function as possible. Audiologists work with people who have difficulty hearing, recommend and sometimes dispense hearing aids.

Occupational therapists are skilled professionals whose education includes the study of human growth and development with specific emphasis on the social, emotional, and physiological effects of illness and injury. Occupational therapists help individuals achieve independence in all facets of their lives. OT's give people the "skills for the job of living" that are needed for independent and satisfying lives. Services typically include:

- Customized treatment programs aimed at improving abilities to carry out the activities of daily living,
- Comprehensive evaluation of home and job environments and recommendations on necessary adaptation
- Assessments and treatment for performance skills
- Recommendations and training in the use of adaptive equipment
- Guidance to family members and caregivers

Physical therapists (PT) help people whose strength, ability to move, or sensation is impaired. They may use exercise; heat, cold, or water therapy; or other treatments to control pain, strengthen muscles, and improve coordination.

Speech-language pathologists are professionals who are educated to assess speech and language development and to treat language and speech disorders, and help people with swallowing disorders; sometimes informally referred to as speech therapists.

GENERAL CARE

Pharmacists are knowledgeable about the chemical makeup and correct use of medicines - the names, ingredients, side effects, and uses in the treatment of medical problems. Pharmacists have legal authority to dispense drugs according to formal instructions issued by physicians, dentists, or podiatrists. They also can provide information on nonprescription products sold in pharmacies.

Physician assistants (PA) usually work in hospitals or physicians' offices and do some of the tasks traditionally performed by physicians, such as taking medical histories and doing physical examinations. PAs must always be under the supervision of a physician.

Podiatrists (DPM) diagnose, treat, and prevent diseases and injuries of the foot. They may do surgery, make devices to correct or prevent foot problems, provide toenail care, and prescribe certain drugs.

Registered dietitians (RD) provide nutrition care services and dietary counseling in health and disease. Most work in hospitals, public health agencies, or physicians' offices, but some have private practices.

Social Workers in health care settings secure community services for patients, provide counseling when necessary, and help patients and their families handle problems related to physical and mental illness and disability. They frequently coordinate the multiple aspects of care related to illness, including discharge planning from hospitals.