



# Scope of Practice Kit: What is a Physician?

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When you go to see your doctor, you may or may not be aware that different health care practitioners are responsible for different parts of your care. The United States is adopting a new model of primary care delivery that is built around patients called the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH). A PCMH calls on family physicians to lead health care teams towards a standard of care that increases quality as well as affordability.

- In order to effectively lead a health care team in patient care, a medical doctor must complete a long and rigorous primary care training program. Medical doctors are required to complete 4 years of graduate-level education and 3 to 7 years of residency training in which they log between 12,000 and 16,000 hours of clinical patient care.
- During this training period, physicians are taught to provide thorough exams in order to be able to make complex diagnoses. These diagnoses move beyond just symptom management, to develop comprehensive treatment plans for the whole patient.
- By seeing a board-certified primary care physician, patients encounter fewer emergency room visits, fewer hospital admissions and readmissions, and shorter hospital stays.
- One out of every four patients in the United States is treated by a family physician, and more than 215 million office visits are made to family physicians each year.
- More than 43% of family physicians are also available to patients through extended evening and weekend office hours. Physician availability and flexibility are part of the core principles of the patient centered medical home model.
- Family physicians are the main source of primary health care for Medicare recipients. Sixty percent of people aged 65 and older identify a family doctor as their usual source of care. Rural and Hispanic seniors are more likely to identify a family physician as their main source of health care.
- As the landscape of health care continues to change, family physicians remain firmly positioned to treat all people with a focus on prevention, wellness, and overall care coordination.