



## **Seeing a Doctor**

- In Australia most people go to a family doctor - a GP (this is not a JP – explain the difference), when they have sickness or it is time for a health check-up to look for any internal sickness that you cannot see to stop you getting sick. It is good to have a health check every year even if you do not feel sick. This check means the doctor can look for internal sickness and make sure you get any treatment you need. You can ask your GP to put in their computer to ring you each year to come in for a health check.
- GP doctors look after your body sickness but also sickness that comes from stress.
- They look after you and work out what needs to be done to help you be well.
- When you have sickness and go to the GP they may look after you directly themselves and give you instructions of what to do and sometimes prescribe medicine, maybe send you for blood tests or x-ray (pictures of your insides that are done with a special machine), refer you to a private specialist, refer you to the community health centre or to refer you to the specialist at the hospital outpatient clinic.
- GP doctors work from small offices or clinics called medical centres or surgeries. These clinics or medical centres are usually open from 9am to 5pm on Monday to Friday but some are open for longer hours and on weekends.
- You are able to choose your own GP doctor. If you are not happy with your GP doctor you can choose a new GP. It is a good idea to ask friends, family members

or people in your community about which GPs they are happy with, which GPs know how to use interpreters or whether there is a GP who speaks your language.

- If you do change your GP and go to a different clinic, you can ask that the records from your previous GP be sent to the new GP. (If you are just seeing a different GP at the same clinic then this should not be necessary.) You could also ask your new GP to request the records when you see them but it can be helpful to them to have your past history when they see you for the first time. You will probably need to sign a form to say you give consent for the records to be sent. Sometimes there may be a cost for this.
- It can be useful to keep a copy of the GP's business card in your purse or wallet in case someone else needs to know and you can't remember the address or their name.
- GP doctors work by appointment times. It is important to ring or go and make an appointment at the medical centre. You cannot just turn up and expect to see the doctor straight away. If you just turn up you may be asked to leave or have to wait a very, very long time and still may not see the doctor.
- You must also make a separate appointment for each person or child who needs to see the doctor. Each person's appointment is usually 10 to 15 minutes long. If you have a lot of sicknesses you can book for a long appointment. If it is your first time at the clinic the GP might want you to have a longer appointment. If a mother and three children all need to see the doctor, then you must tell the receptionist, that you need 4 appointments for 1 adult and 3 children.
- It is important to arrive at the medical centre about five minutes before your appointment time. Sometimes if you turn up late your appointment will no longer be available and you will have to make a new appointment and come back another day.
- When you go to your appointment you go into the medical centre and tell the receptionist that you are there. Then sit down and wait for the receptionist or doctor to call your name for your appointment. If you need an interpreter it is good to remind them that you need one for this appointment.
- When your name is called you go in to see the doctor and tell them why you are there.
- You can get the most benefit from your visit to the doctor by thinking ahead of time about all your health problems and making sure you remember to tell him about everything that is troubling you.

- Tell the doctor about all the medicines you are taking. This includes herbal medicines, traditional medicines, remedies, vitamins and herbs. It is good to bring all your medicines you are taking with you to show the doctor.
- If you cannot go to your appointment you must ring and cancel your appointments ahead of time. Some GPs and Specialists may want you to pay a cancellation fee if you weren't at the surgery at your appointment time and you didn't ring and cancel.
- If you need an interpreter for the doctor visit please tell the receptionist when you make the appointment. If you want an interpreter during your appointment with the doctor tell them what language or you may want to show them your "I need an interpreter card". Also tell them whether you want a face to face interpreter or a telephone interpreter.
- Doctors are always able to use free interpreters no matter what day or time it is. The doctor can ring the Doctor Interpreter line 1300 131 450 to get a phone interpreter.
- Sometimes the doctor may be running late and you need to wait past your appointment time. The doctors try to avoid this, but it does happen. You are able to ask the receptionist how long they think the doctor will be before they can see you. If you are starting to feel worse – sicker – it is very important that you tell the receptionist or ask someone to do this for you.
- When your appointment is finished you need to pay at the reception.
- If you have a Medicare Card - Some doctors 'bulk bill' which means that you give your Medicare Card to the receptionist, and then they get you to sign a form and the cost of seeing the doctor is charged to Medicare. This means you do not have to pay any money when you see your doctor. Medicare is part of Australia's health system and is managed by the Federal Government.
- However some doctors do not 'bulk bill'. This means that there will be some extra money to pay for each appointment when you visit the doctor. You will have to pay the doctor the full amount they charge and then you can claim some money back from Medicare. Sometimes the receptionist processes the claim to Medicare while you are at the medical centre and it will be sent to you. But sometimes you will have to pay the whole amount, get the receipt and then go to a Medicare office and claim some of the money back. If doctors do not "bulk bill" you will never get all the money back, you will always only get some of the money back that you paid.
- If the doctor orders lots of tests for you like blood tests, x-rays or special tests, you should ask the doctor how much it will cost. It is OK to check this with the

doctor and sometimes they might be able to find a way to make it a less expensive.

- It is important to make an appointment to come back to the doctor to get the results of your tests. Ask your doctor how long before you should come back. The doctor will want to tell you the results in person. Do not think that just because they haven't phoned you, that everything is alright.

### ***Things the family doctor (GP) may do***

- The doctor may take your blood pressure – this is to see how your heart is working. They might also listen to your heart and breathing with a stethoscope.
- The doctor may need to look at the part of you that has sickness
- The doctor may need to take a sample of urine to test – this is to check for sickness in your kidneys or bladder or to see if you are pregnant
- The doctor may need to send you to have X-rays so they can see pictures of your insides and your bones
- The doctor may send you to have blood tests
- The doctor may tell you to take some medicine or give you a prescription for medicine. You must follow their instructions. If you don't understand please tell the doctor and ask for the interpreter to explain it again. The doctor will want to make sure you understand what to do with your medicines. If you have a Health Care Card and or a Pension Concession Card you need to take these with you to the pharmacy with the prescription the doctor gave you. Showing these cards when you buy the prescription medicine will make it cheaper. But it will still cost you some money. We will talk some more about Medicines a bit later.
- The doctor may want you to come back again. They will tell you when they want this to happen. You will need to speak to the receptionist and make a new appointment for this time. It is helpful to do this while you are there at the medical centre and then they will also know to book an interpreter for that appointment.

### ***Specialists***

- The doctor may refer you to a private Specialist or the Specialist Outpatients Clinic of the Hospital. It's important to double check with the GP doctor when you are there what you need to do to make sure you get an appointment with the Specialist and whether his referral is to a private Specialist or a Specialist at the Specialist Outpatients Clinic of the hospital. If you need to see a woman Specialist rather than a man, please tell the family doctor this when he is writing

the referral. You can ask the receptionist or the interpreter to help you make the Specialist appointment if you need to. Make sure they know the language you speak for them to book an interpreter. There may be some time that you need to wait before the Specialist has an available appointment.

- If you see a Specialist at the Specialist Outpatient Clinic at the public hospital then there will be no payment needed by you. You will need your Medicare Card when you go to the appointment. However there is often a longer wait to get an appointment with the Specialist at the Outpatient Clinic at the public hospital. When you go to the Specialist Outpatient Clinic at the hospital for your appointment time, there is often a wait to see the Specialist, as a lot of people go to the Specialist Outpatient Clinic and the Specialists sometimes run late with their appointments. It is best to wait to be seen; otherwise it may be a long time before you get another appointment.
- You might already have x-rays or copies of other test results that your GP doctor asked you to have done. Take these with you to the specialist. Specialists sometimes recommend blood tests or X-rays or other procedures. If you have your results with you, it makes it easier to see what you need to have done. It is important to understand their advice and their instructions on what they want you to do. Then you are able to make a decision about what you want to do. It may be helpful to discuss their advice with family or someone you respect if you need to make any decisions. The Specialist may want to see you again, and you will need to make another appointment for this.
- You must arrive on time or a little bit early for your appointment with the Specialist. If you do not arrive for your appointment or you arrive late they may send you away without seeing the Specialist. It may be a long while before you can get another appointment with the Specialist.
- If you see a private Specialist (not at the hospital) they will charge a fee and this will be quite a bit more than the GP doctor. Most private Specialists do not bulk bill, so you will have to pay the bill and then claim some of the money back from Medicare. You will never get the whole lot back from Medicare, only some of the money you paid. It is important that you check what fees the Specialist will charge you and how much you will get back from Medicare when you make the appointment.

## **Community Health Centres**

There are community health centres across Queensland. Community health centres run clinics for a number of different health services. The types of clinics that are run are different in each area. This is because what each community needs is different. They are different to the GP doctor clinic and are mostly run by nurses and others like physiotherapists or social workers.

The clinics are at no cost if you have a Medicare card and you can go and get information and health checks for some health conditions.

**Examples of some community health centre clinics are:**

- Diabetes clinic for people with blood sugar problems
- Baby / child health clinics – to check children are growing and healthy and sometimes to give vaccinations
- Cancer screening services such as Breast Screen
- Chest clinics - for testing and checking for TB tuberculosis

To find out more about what community health centre clinics are near you and what services they have, you can ask your GP, friends or other community members, or you can:

- Call 13 14 50, Monday to Friday 9am-5pm

- Say the language you need
- Wait on the line for an interpreter (may take up to 3 minutes)
- Ask the interpreter to call the 13HEALTH line on 13 43 25 84.
- Ask about community health centre clinics near you with the help of your interpreter.