

What does excellent primary care mean to our patients?

Based on the GNYHA/UHF Clinical Quality Fellowship Program Presentation by Rohit Bhalla, MD, Senior Vice President, Clinical Affairs and Quality, and Chief Clinical and Quality Officer, Stamford Hospital

Your mother has just returned from a trip to Guyana. While away, she noticed that she is thirsty all of the time and frequently runs to the bathroom to urinate. She seen by a family physician who diagnosed her with diabetes. Traditionally resistant to medical intervention, she is convinced that some much needed sleep and Bush tea will make the diabetes go away. Other than your OB/GYN, you do not know any healthcare providers in NY.

You would like your mom to receive care at the highest quality primary care practice which will provide the best clinical care. Which practice will you call?

Practice A is a small, multispecialty practice with 5 primary care physicians. It is an Article 28 facility, affiliated with a large, reputable teaching hospital in another borough. The website mentions that it is a NCQA Level 3 Patient Centered Medical Home.

The hospital website lists the names and credentials of the practicing providers, two of whom graduated from US medical schools. All providers are board certified MDs or DOs and completed residency programs in the US. While some are new grads, others have practiced Internal Medicine for 20 years. The practice does not utilize nurse practitioners or physician assistants as part of their medical team. Each doctor has a patient experience rating ranging from 4.4 to 4.7 stars out of 5 (based on responses to the CG-CAHPS survey). One physician speaks French and one speaks Spanish.

The hospital supports multiple residency programs, including nationally known programs in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics. Two physicians are Assistant Clinical Professors at the School of Medicine. Publications listed in their New York State Department of Health physician profiles are 5 to 10 years old. One of the physicians had a malpractice case reported in the last 10 years.

The website boasts accreditations by US News and World Report as a High Performing Hospital in Diabetes, Stroke and Heart Failure for 2020-21. There are no endocrinologists who work in the practice. Every patient living with diabetes is seen by a primary care provider, podiatrist and ophthalmologist at this multispecialty practice site.

The Hospital Compare website from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services rates the hospital three stars out of five, highlighting that patient satisfaction data is comparable to national averages. The only information specific to ambulatory care and preventative healthcare notes that 91% of the patients received flu vaccines this year as well as 88% of the staff.

The Yelp reviews give one physician 1/5 stars for giving out drug samples to patients. Another physician is noted as being very detail oriented but slow – the patient was late to work despite scheduling her appointment 3 hours before the start of her work day. A link to ZocDoc is provided on the website, but when you click to schedule an appointment, the next available date is in 3 months.

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Practice B is a large primary care practice with 25 primary care providers who are credentialed as MDs and NPs. The practice is certified as an NCQA Level 3 Patient Centered Medical Home and was recently accredited by the Joint Commission.

The hospital website shows a picture of a large ambulatory center on the hospital campus. You notice a banner at the front of the entrance which boasts, “Rated #1 in NYC for Healthfirst Satisfaction with a Primary Care Provider”.

You click on a link to the hospital news flash, which boasts that the practice cares for 7,500 patients living with diabetes. There is a logo showcasing “NCQA Diabetes Recognition”. In addition, the Brooklyn-Kings Diabetes Education Program, administered on-site, is certified by the American Diabetes Association as meeting national standards for diabetes self-management. A picture of the Diabetes Resource Center shows a team of nurse practitioners, registered nurses, certified diabetes educators and registered dietitians. Of the 200 patients enrolled in the 2019 program, 150 graduated, having attended at least 4 out of the 6 classes offered. The average a1c drop after enrollment in this program was 2 points. A team of endocrinologists practice in the ambulatory center, and are actively recruiting patients for a large multicenter trial.

The practice is a teaching site for a large, urban medical school with multiple residency programs. Internal Medicine Residents care for patients under the supervision of 12 Assistant or Associate Clinical Professors of Medicine, all faculty of the medical school and PCPs in the practice. Docinfo.org shows that all primary care providers are board certified in Internal Medicine or Family Medicine and some of the nurse practitioners have advanced doctorate degrees. No disciplinary actions were taken by state medical boards. The Healthgrades listings for providers in the practice show that many completed residency programs at reputable programs. PCP experience practicing medicine ranges from 1-25 years. 5 providers are actively involved in research encompassing a broad range of topics including practice management, medical education, and population health.

The Hospital Compare website from CMS gives the hospital one star out of five based on inpatient and outpatient quality reporting. Ambulatory specific areas included follow up after normal and abnormal colonoscopy, flu vaccination rates for staff, improvement of patient’s vision after cataract surgery, and hospital visits within 7 days of a colonoscopy. 77% patients reported that their doctors “Always” communicated well, which met regional but not national benchmarks. The percent of patients who had a follow-up mammogram, breast ultrasound, or breast MRI within 45 days after an abnormal screening mammogram was above the national average.

A friend from church tells you that she was “born at this hospital and will die there” – she loves her primary care provider and won’t let any other hospital “touch me”. She mentions that she used to give herself a day to be seen and get her prescriptions at the hospital pharmacy, and no longer needs to do this – she can find herself in and out of her appointment within about an hour.

There are no links for ZocDoc on the website, but you call the appointment line and are offered a new patient visit next week. The scheduler cannot tell you which doctor you will be scheduled to see.

Which primary care practice will you call to make an appointment for your mom?

Consider the quality of primary care delivery in three domains: Structure, Process, and Outcome