



Who's Who in Health Care: A Glossary

Part of empowering all of us to be equal partners in health care is understanding who does what and how we can all work together.

Health care provider: People who work in health care and who give health care. It includes the doctor, but it can also include other parts of the team like a nurse or social worker, a psychologist, or an x-ray technician.

General practitioner (GP) or “family doctor”: A GP is a doctor that you can go to first for any health problems. They do routine checkups and screening tests, give you flu and immunization shots, and manage diabetes and other ongoing medical conditions.

Some people have built a relationship with their GP over time, which can be helpful as the doctor gets to understand that person's particular needs and medical history. GPs work in many types of health services including family health teams and community health centres. See the “*Finding a Family Doctor*” tip sheet in this section for more information on these different types of clinics. Your GP may refer you to other health care providers when necessary, such as:

Allergist: A doctor who diagnoses and treats asthma and allergies (asthma and allergies typically go hand-in-hand).

Anesthesiologist: A doctor who works with patients who are having surgery or need relief from pain. This doctor is responsible for keeping patients safe and free of pain during and after surgery.

Audiologist: A health care professional who diagnoses and treats hearing problems and issues with balance. They can assess whether someone has trouble with hearing and give recommendations to help deal with this.

Behaviour therapist: Someone whose job is to help people learn new or change behaviours that are causing problems in their daily lives, often using an approach like Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA).

Cardiologist: A doctor who diagnoses and treats issues with the heart and blood vessels.

Chiropractor: A health care provider who works with people to prevent and treat issues such as back and neck pain, headaches, whiplash, strains and sprains, work and sports injuries, arthritis, and difficulty moving your back, shoulders, neck, or limbs.

Counsellor: A professional that you can discuss your difficulties with and who can help you learn ways to cope with stress and sadness.

Dental hygienist: A health care provider who cleans teeth, examines patients' mouths for signs of disease and helps patients keep their mouth and teeth healthy.

Dentist: A health care provider who deals with oral health to make sure that a patient's teeth and jaws are healthy. They also help to prevent and treat oral diseases and conditions.

Dermatologist: A doctor who identifies, treats and prevents diseases of the skin, hair and nails.

Dietitian: A Registered Dietitian (RD) is a food and nutrition expert. They are trained to give advice and counselling about diet, food and nutrition.

Endocrinologist: A doctor who diagnoses and treats hormone problems and conditions (including diabetes).

Gastroenterologist: A doctor who diagnoses and treats issues with the gastrointestinal (GI) tract (which is a part of the body that is involved in digestion, absorbing nutrients and removing waste from the body).

General surgeon: A doctor who cares for patients before, during and after a surgery on any part of the body.

Hematologist: A doctor who deals with the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of blood-related disorders.

Immunologist: A doctor who diagnoses, treats and prevents disorders of the immune system (a system in the body that protects the body from infection). Immunologists are involved in treating health conditions such as allergies, pneumonia and sinus issues.

Infectious disease specialist: A doctor who deals with the diagnosis, control and treatment of infections in any part of the body.

Nephrologist: A doctor who specializes in kidney care and treating diseases of the kidneys.

Neurologist: A doctor who treats disorders (such as strokes) that affect the brain, spinal cord, and nerves.

Nurse: A health care provider who is trained to help people who are sick or injured. Nurses work with doctors and other health care workers to care for patients when they are sick and to keep them fit and healthy.

Nurse practitioner: An advanced practice registered nurse who is trained to assess patient needs, order and interpret laboratory tests, diagnose illness and disease, and formulate treatment plans. Nurse practitioners can also prescribe medication.

Nutritionist: A health care provider who is trained to give advice and counseling about diet, food, and nutrition. Nutritionists can have varying degrees of education in nutrition.

Obstetrician/gynecologist: A doctor who specializes in the care of women who are pregnant or are going through childbirth, and in some cases, helps women with their general medical care. They can also diagnose, treat and help prevent diseases of the reproductive system.

Occupational therapist: A health care provider who helps to solve problems that prevent a person from being able to do things that are important to them (things like: caring for themselves, playing sports, doing activities with others, or doing things at school or work).

Oncologist: A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancer.

Optometrist: A health care provider who diagnoses, treats and helps prevent any issues related to a person's eyes. They also provide eyewear products like glasses or contact lenses.



Ophthalmologist: A doctor and surgeon who specializes in eye diseases.

Orthopedic specialist: A doctor who specializes in issues and diseases with a person's bones. These doctors are involved in everything from treating things like sprained ankles or broken bones to complex procedures and surgeries like hip replacements.

Otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat doctor): A doctor who specializes in disorders of the head and neck, particularly those related to the ears, nose and throat.

Pharmacist: A health care provider who gives patients the medications that were prescribed by their doctor and helps them understand more about the medications and any side effects or things to keep in mind about the medications. Pharmacists are a great resource if you have questions about medications you are taking.

Physiatrist: A doctor who treats and rehabilitates physical disabilities and pain caused by injury or illness.

Physical therapist (physiotherapist): A health care provider who works with patients to help them regain movement and manage pain caused by physical disabilities or injuries.

Psychiatrist: A doctor who diagnoses, treats and works to prevent mental, emotional and behavioural disorders. They can also prescribe medications related to mental health disorders.

Psychologist: A health care provider who assesses, diagnoses and treats psychological and behavioural problems. They work to promote healthy behaviour and improve patients' quality of life.

Psychotherapist: A mental health professional who specializes in providing psychotherapy (i.e., the treatment of mental disorders or other psychological problems).

Pulmonary disease specialist (respirologist): A doctor who diagnoses and treats lung conditions and diseases.

Radiologist: A doctor who diagnoses and treats disease and injury by using medical imaging equipment such as x-rays, CT, MRI, and PET scans and ultrasounds.

Rheumatologist: A doctor who diagnoses and treats pain and other symptoms related to joints and other parts of the musculoskeletal system, like arthritis.

Social worker: A health care provider who is responsible for helping individuals, families and groups of people to cope with problems they are facing to improve their lives.

Speech and language pathologist: A health care provider who assesses and manages disorders related to speaking and swallowing.

Urologist: A health care provider who treats conditions relating to the urinary tract as well as disorders of the male reproductive system.

