

Why You Should Keep Your Primary Care Physician

By Feliz Rael

Every nursing home resident has the right to choose her own doctor. A nursing home may ask you to consent to have the facility's medical director be your new primary physician. But, a nursing home resident is not required to accept a facility's medical director as her new doctor.

Please resist any idea that it will be more convenient for the medical director to be your doctor because he comes to the facility frequently. There are several reasons why you should keep your old doctor even though your new nursing home has a medical director that visits the facility frequently.

First, your doctor already knows you and your health conditions. Your old doctor may be able to remember that you didn't always live in a nursing home or assisted living facility and may have a better sense of your ability to recover from illness or injury. This is a valuable perspective that a nursing home's medical director may not have.

A nursing home's medical director may have come to expect a certain turn-over rate for his nursing home patients and may not invest time or effort into a new relationship that he does not expect to last. In addition, a nursing home medical director probably feels some loyalty to the nursing home because it is a significant source of patients and business. Consciously or unconsciously, a medical director may be reluctant to criticize the nursing home's care because he doesn't want to jeopardize this source of business. You want a doctor whose primary loyalty is to you or your loved one and who will be your care advocate.

It is certainly possible that a doctor who is also a medical director will make a good primary care doctor. However, I have observed that some of the best advocates for better nursing home care for all residents are the doctors who visit just a few patients in the nursing home. These doctors simply tend to have higher expectations. You have a right to those higher expectations.