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Don’t Have a Primary Care Provider? Information for Orphan Patients and their Families

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Summary: Ideally, every family would have a primary care provider (such as a family physician or nurse practitioner) to take care of their needs, but unfortunately there are shortages of primary care providers. Nonetheless, there are things that can be done in the meanwhile, until a primary care provider can be found.

Case: "We need med refills but don't have a family doctor!"

J. is a parent with a 10-yo child who takes prescription medications. Unfortunately, their family doctor unexpectedly retired and closed down the practice. Now they need medication refills, and they simply don’t know what to do.

Introduction

It is always best to have a regular primary care provider, that one can see for health issues and renew medications if necessary. Unfortunately, with the current healthcare shortages, sometimes people can find themselves “orphaned” or without a primary care provider. Fortunately, there are some strategies that may be helpful until you can find another regular primary care provider.

Recommendations

Do you have a primary care provider, but have some advance notice that you will be losing them?

- **Ask the provider to write a “To whom it may concern letter”,** which states
  - Your child’s diagnoses
  - Your child’s medications
  - Any other key treatment plans
- This letter will hopefully make it easier for you to get refills for your medications in the future.

Do you find yourself without a primary care provider?

- **Ask the pharmacist for refills in the short-run.** Do you need a medication refill, but haven’t yet had a chance to explore any other options? Most pharmacists will give you a refill for a few days or longer, until you can come up with a plan.
- **Visit a walk-in clinic.** If you do not have a regular prescriber, you can visit a walk-in clinic. Ideally, you can show your “To whom it may concern” to make it easier for them to give you refills, or a similar medical

report that states your child's diagnoses and medications.

- **Visit an emergency department.** This is a least preferred option. If you are to do this, its best to at least go during less busy times, e.g. first thing in the morning after 8-9 AM on weekdays or weekends. **Ask them if they know about any primary care providers taking on new patients.**

Finding a primary care provider

- Usual tips to find a primary care provider include:
    - Ask family and extended family if they can recommend someone. Often primary care providers are more open to taking you on if you are from the same family (hence the original term “family doctor”).
- Call local clinics in the phone book and ask if they know anyone taking on new patients.

Looking for a primary care provider in Ontario?

- If so, contact the Health Care Connect program https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-family-doctor-or-nurse-practitioner

Still struggling?

- Call 211 to ask what resources they have about primary care providers in your area. 211 is an information and referral service available in most communities in Canada.

Authors

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