

Choosing a Hand Surgeon

Choosing the right doctor is a very important and, at times, a complex problem. There is no one right way to choose a doctor, but here are some things you should consider.

Academic qualifications

The first thing to consider is the doctor's academic qualifications: is he or she board certified in hand surgery? The highest certification that a doctor can have in hand surgery is called the Certificate of Added Qualifications in Hand Surgery. Most hand surgeons who have such a certification will list it in their yellow pages ad; if not, call the office and ask. Do not be afraid to ask questions when you are choosing a doctor: it is your hand, after all! If the office does not want to answer questions about the doctor's qualifications, you do not want to go to that doctor. Dr. Bernstein has such a certification.

Practice type

Does the doctor do only hand surgery, or is hand surgery something they only do occasionally or in addition to other types of surgery? You can usually find this out by asking the office receptionist. Another good way to find out how important hand surgery is to the doctor is to look at their yellow pages ad: if they have a small ad in hand surgery, but a very large ad in another specialty, such as plastic surgery, you can probably guess which area of medicine is more important to them.

Dr. Bernstein limits his practice to only hand and upper extremity surgery, and he does this full-time. This is documented on the website, www.togct.com, as well as on his stationery and his business card. His ad only appears under hand surgery (actually, the yellow pages has "Hand Surgery" under "Surgery, Hand") and orthopedics (his original board certification); both specify that he limits his practice to hand surgery. He does not do general orthopedics, plastic surgery, or general surgery.

Is the doctor in your insurance plan?

You probably want to stay within your insurance plan, since it will be more expensive to see a doctor outside of your plan. However, depending on how serious your problem is, or how important your hand is to your work or recreation, you may consider seeing someone outside your plan, at least for an initial consultation.

Dr. Bernstein participates in a variety of health plans. If your insurance plan is not accepted, call our billing office to get an estimate of how much it might cost to go out of your plan.

Does the doctor within your plan have any financial incentives to limit your treatment?

Many patients don't realize that many plans pay financial incentives to their participating doctors to limit the treatment that they offer to their patients, such as restricting referrals only to same-plan doctors. This is the "managed" part of "managed care." There are other, more subtle ways

that managed care may affect your hand problem. Dr. Bernstein does not participate in any plans that pay financial incentives to limit patient care.

How long will you have to wait in the doctor's office?

An interesting and insightful question when you are selecting a doctor is to ask the receptionist what the average wait is for the doctor. If they don't know, it means that they haven't studied this part of their practice and you might wonder if they consider your time important. If they say the average wait is an hour or more, you know that they don't respect their patients or consider their time important.

We think that your time is just as important as ours. We have kept track of the time patients wait in our office for several years, and the average time is less than 15 minutes.

How long will you have to wait to get an appointment?

Many patients are finding that they cannot get a timely appointment, even for an urgent matter such as a fracture.

Our office policy is that any patient with a new fracture will be seen in the office the next day we are in, whether or not there is an appointment opening. Obviously, emergencies cannot be scheduled or be put off until it conveniently fits into the doctor's schedule, and we hope our other patients understand the emergent nature of our work and minimize the wait unless it was absolutely necessary.

We hope that these suggestions will help you in deciding if you would like to make an appointment with our office.