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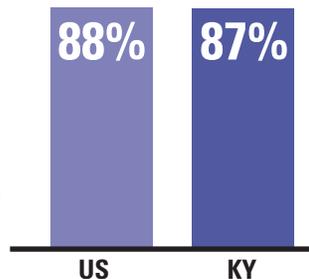
Getting a Good Second Opinion

Americans and the Second Opinion

Americans today are taking more responsibility for managing their own health care. They are becoming more informed about their medical problems and treatment options and playing an active role in every decision with their doctors. Increasingly, consumers are seeking second opinions, showing the strong value Americans and the people of Kentucky place on being in control of their health.

Consumers 65 and Over Who Would Seek a Second Opinion

Response to the question: "If your doctor told you that you had an incurable and fatal disease, would you accept that diagnosis or seek a second opinion?"



Source: Kentucky Poll 2005; Schoder SA, 1994

Why Should You Seek a Second Opinion?

Because of the increase in medical knowledge and new treatments, it is difficult for any one physician to be aware of all the latest information. One result is patients and their physicians together are seeking second opinions so better and more informed decisions can be made.

For minor health problems, second opinions are usually unnecessary. However, a second opinion is probably a good idea if you are:

- Having major surgery
- Questioning whether surgery is the only option
- A problem that has been difficult for your regular doctor to diagnose
- Having trouble talking to your current doctor(s)
- Not seeing improvement in your medical condition
- Diagnosed with a life-threatening disease such as cancer, heart disease or brain tumor
- Told a second surgery is recommended
- Having multiple medical problems

Second Opinion Options

Some physicians disagree about whether you should get a *blind* second opinion (when medical records, test results and the first physician's opinion are not made available to the second doctor) or if this information should be shared with the second opinion doctor. The advantage of the *blind* second opinion is that it cannot be influenced by previous information. The disadvantage is that your second opinion doctor may not be able to tell you why his/her opinion is different without knowing the basis of the first doctor's opinion. A third option is to provide test results, X-rays and other information without the first doctor's written diagnosis and treatment

recommendation. Most second opinion doctors prefer knowing the first opinion, but they can still provide a good second opinion if they can at least review previous X-rays, test results and medical records. This information is helpful as it often provides clues and baselines to compare to new test results. Typically, coordinating care with your regular doctor is preferred, but is not essential.

Questions to Ask During a Second Opinion Appointment

- Is there a chance the medical problem could have a different diagnosis?
- Are there any alternative forms of treatment available?
- What are the likely results if you wait or don't have the treatment?
- What are the risks associated with the treatment(s)?
- Are there any side effects or residual effects from each treatment option?
- How is the treatment plan expected to improve your health or quality of life?
- How long is the recovery period?
- If the second opinion differs from the initial one, why? (It is important to understand the reasoning behind a medical opinion.)

Key Points to Remember About Second Opinions

- Second opinions are your right as a patient.
- Second opinions may be mandatory for certain conditions or procedures. Your insurance or health plan may reduce or eliminate the benefits paid if a second opinion is not obtained. Most

second opinions are voluntary and are usually paid for by your insurance or health plan. However, always check with your insurance or health plan for specific policies.

- See an expert physician.
- Benefits of a second opinion include more knowledge, understanding of new treatment options and reassurance and peace of mind that you are making the right decision.
- Virtually every doctor gets a second opinion when they have a serious medical problem.

Getting Started

- Many patients are still uncomfortable asking their doctors about getting a second opinion. They are afraid of hurting their doctor's feelings. A doctor should not be offended if you ask about a second opinion, but it really depends on how you bring it up. Start your conversation by stating that you need to gather as much information as possible to make an educated decision.
- Ask your family doctor to give you the name of a specialist(s) who has a great deal of experience in diagnosing and treating your illness. Or specifically, ask your doctor to refer you to a UK HealthCare expert physician.
- UK HealthCare has more than 500 physicians, many of whom are known nationally for their expertise.
- Each year, UK HealthCare physicians perform thousands of second opinions for patients.
- Almost 20 percent of the new patients seen at UK HealthCare each year are coming for a second opinion.

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Call UK Health Connection at (859) 257-1000 or toll free (800) 333-8874 to make an appointment or request a referral. Visit us online at www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu.

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