Making the Pick

Tips for choosing a provider

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Contact your former doctor, friends, local HIV/AIDS organization (you can find one at directory.poz.com) or health department for the names and numbers of trusted caregivers. You can also contact the American Academy of HIV Medicine at aahivm.org or 202-659-0699.

Feel out the office via a phone call. Is the staff friendly? Do they patiently answer all your questions about health coverage, how long the doctor has been treating HIV, how long the usual wait for an appointment is? If they are helpful and nice, that's a good sign. As you shop around, keep a list of who takes your insurance and who made a good first impression on the phone.

If you have more than one choice in your area, set up a visit with your first one and see how it goes. Remember, you need not commit for life on visit No. 1. Was the provider patient and engaged? Open to answering all your questions? Curious about your needs and choices? Accessible when you had questions or prescription needs? If so, sounds like it may be a good match. Not so much? Make an appointment elsewhere!

You may be in an area with only one or two HIV care clinics. If so, resolve to make the best of it by being the best patient you can be. Feel like your doctor is dismissing you? Start by putting your complaint "in the I" ("I'm worried I'm not leaving with the answers I need") rather than "in the you" ("You are being rude and unresponsive to my needs!"). Stating your needs without attacking your medical provider can go a long way.

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