

How Healthy Is Your Relationship With Your Primary Care Doctor?

A Guide to What Good Primary Care Really Looks Like

A few months ago, a woman in her early forties came to see me. She had been to three different doctors in the past year. At each visit, she mentioned fatigue. Each time, labs came back normal.

The problem was never her body. The problem was that no one had been watching.

When I looked at her chart, I saw something none of them had seen. Her thyroid numbers were technically normal. But compared to four years earlier, they had shifted in a direction that explained everything she had been feeling.

We made an adjustment. Six weeks later, she felt like herself again.

What Good Primary Care Looks Like

Primary care, at its best, is a relationship. Someone who knows you, tracks your health over time, and catches problems before they become crises.

That kind of care requires something specific: continuity. The same physician, visit after visit. Enough time to listen. A practice structured around knowing patients deeply rather than seeing as many as possible.

Not everyone has access to that. But it exists. And when you experience it, the difference is immediate.

Why This Matters Clinically

The research on this is clear.

Multiple longitudinal studies have shown that patients who see the same primary care physician over time have fewer emergency room visits, are hospitalized less often, and have lower mortality rates. The effect is significant and consistent across populations.

Sankofa Family Medicine

MEDICINE THAT REMEMBERS

The reason is straightforward. A physician who knows you can see things that a stranger cannot.

They notice when your blood pressure, though technically normal, has been creeping upward for three years. They remember that your father had heart disease. They recognize that your "normal" fatigue is actually new for you. They catch the pattern before it becomes a crisis.

This is not magic. It is medicine practiced with memory, attention, and time.

Three Kinds of Primary Care

When patients describe their experiences, their stories tend to fall into three categories. Read each description and notice which one sounds most familiar.

1. Continuity-Driven Care

This is what primary care is supposed to be. A physician who knows your history, your family, your life. Someone who tracks your health over years and notices changes before they become problems. A true partner does not just manage symptoms. They manage trajectory.

- You see the same physician at every visit
- Your doctor remembers details about your life without checking the chart
- You can get an appointment within days, not weeks
- You have a direct way to reach your physician
- Your doctor compares your current labs to previous years
- Your family history has shaped your care plan
- You feel comfortable raising vague or minor concerns
- Your care feels coordinated, not fragmented

2. Capacity-Limited Care

Your doctor is skilled and well-intentioned, but stretched thin. Visits feel rushed. Follow-up sometimes falls through the cracks. You sense that your doctor cares, but there is not enough time to show it. The relationship is there in spirit, but not in structure.

- Appointments take weeks to schedule
- Visits feel rushed or cut short
- You often see different providers
- You have to remind your doctor of your history
- Phone calls go to a general line, not your doctor
- Lab results come with little explanation
- You leave with unanswered questions
- Prevention is mentioned but rarely acted on

3. Misaligned Care

Sometimes the fit is simply wrong. The physician's style does not match what you need. Communication breaks down. You feel dismissed, unheard, or like a number. Trust erodes. This is not always anyone's fault. But it is always a problem.

- You dread going to appointments
- Your concerns are minimized or dismissed
- You feel talked at, not listened to
- Your questions are treated as inconveniences
- You leave feeling worse than when you arrived

Sankofa Family Medicine

MEDICINE THAT REMEMBERS

- You have stopped mentioning things that bother you
- You do not trust the advice you receive
- You are considering leaving but have not found an alternative

What This Tells You

Look at the three lists. Which one sounds most like your current situation?

If you checked mostly items in the first category, you have something valuable. Protect it.

If you checked mostly items in the second or third category, you are not alone. Many people find themselves there.

But it does not have to stay that way.

What You Can Do

If you want to improve your current relationship

Ask for longer appointments. Bring a written list of concerns. Request that you see the same physician each time. Ask your doctor directly: "What trends are you watching in my health?" A good physician will welcome the question.

If they cannot or will not make room for you in these ways, that is important information.

If you are ready for something different

Look for practices that limit their patient panels. Ask about response times and direct access. Find out if the physician does their own follow-up or if it is delegated. Ask how they approach prevention and longitudinal tracking.

The answers will tell you everything.

How Sankofa Family Medicine Works

I keep my patient panel small. This is intentional.

It means I have time to know you. It means same-week appointments. It means I do my own follow-up and review my own labs. It means I remember your story without relying only on a chart.

I offer virtual visits when you do not need to come in, and direct communication when you need a quick answer. I track trends over years. I factor in your family history, your circumstances, your goals.

The name Sankofa comes from the Akan people of Ghana. It means "go back and get it." The symbol is a bird reaching backward to retrieve an egg from its past. Understanding where you have been is essential to knowing where you are going.

Sankofa Family Medicine

MEDICINE THAT REMEMBERS

That is how I think about medicine. Your history is not paperwork. It is the foundation of your care.

A Note on Fit

This model is not for everyone.

It works best for people who value continuity, clarity, and long-term thinking. People who want a physician who knows them. People who are willing to invest in staying healthy rather than waiting until something goes wrong.

If you are looking for the fastest or cheapest option, there are many choices. This is not one of them.

If you are looking for someone who is actually watching, it might be.

A Conversation

If what I have described sounds like what you have been looking for, I would be glad to talk.

The first conversation is simple. You tell me what you are looking for. I explain how I practice. We decide together if it is the right fit.

No pressure. No obligation.

Schedule a conversation at sankofafamilymedicine.com

© 2025 Sankofa Family Medicine

All rights reserved.

This document is provided for personal, non-commercial use only.
Reproduction, distribution, or modification without written permission is prohibited.

sankofafamilymedicine.com