

Getting A Second Opinion

by Dr. Delia Chiamonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



Why is it that people tend to spend more time choosing a vacation spot than they do choosing a doctor? This might be OK if you only go to the doctor for the occasional winter cold or summer allergies, but what if you have a serious illness like cancer or multiple sclerosis or lupus?

Isn't it important to thoughtfully and carefully choose the person who will help you out of your health mess? I think it is.

I have heard multiple explanations for why people forgo getting a second opinion. They seem to clump into the following two categories:

- "I don't want to make my doctor upset"
- "Why bother?"

I can understand the instinct not to hurt your doctor's feelings, especially if you are relying on him or her to save your life. But please trust me when I tell you that most doctors fully understand your urge to get a second opinion. They recognize the need to check out all your treatment options before making a decision – believe me if your doctor got cancer, he'd schedule an appointment with the most experienced specialist that he could find. So unless you are already seeing the super-specialist in your condition, give strong consideration to getting another opinion before you choose your treatment plan. Rarely you will come upon a doctor who will not support your decision to seek more information, essentially putting his ego above your health. Give some thought to how much you would trust that doctor to put your health needs above all else.

Some people seem to believe that "medicine is medicine." That is, if you have one nice-enough doctor what is the point in finding another one. And what a hassle that would be, anyway. "Why bother?"

"Why bother?" Because doctors don't all know the same things, that's why. If you see more than one doctor you are likely to learn different things and hear different treatment options. This idea scares some people, but there is no need to be afraid. If you ask each doctor what she thinks about the other doctor's advice and why she favors her own recommendation you will learn a lot. And when you factor in her experience and add some research of your own, you will most likely find that you have developed a clear opinion of how to proceed.

Let me give you an example. A young woman with breast cancer in both breasts was told by her surgeon that she needed a bilateral mastectomy. She found an experienced breast surgeon who had a different opinion. He planned to remove the tumors and give her radiation – a strategy that he said works just as well as mastectomy. After her own research confirmed what the second doctor said and she learned that the first doctor wasn't a breast surgeon, her decision was clear.

If your life or your well-being is at stake, you deserve to get a second opinion.

Be well.

Dr. C

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(photo courtesy of hmiworld.org)

Dr. Chiamonte is a private Health Advocate and the founder of Insight Medical Consultants. She has been quoted by CNN, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today as an expert on patient advocacy.

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