

You may say that things aren't what they used to be. Finding a doctor isn't what it used to be either. You probably aren't going to receive your care from your parent's primary care doctor. You also may need care from specialist from time to time. So how do you find which doctor is best for you? Do you use the internet?

In an opinion piece by Dr. Kevin Pho in [USA TODAY](#) he questions the reliability of internet sites which tout relevant information about physicians. Dr. Pho is a primary care physician in Nashua, New Hampshire who blogs at MedPage Today's KevinMD.com and also is a member of USA TODAY's Board of Contributors. He pointed out that "[a]n Archives of Internal Medicine study in September found that most publicly available information on individual physicians – such as disciplinary actions, the number of malpractice payments, or years of experience – had little correlation with whether they adhered to the recommended medical guidelines. In other words, there's no easy way to research how well a doctor manages conditions such as heart disease or diabetes. That kind of relevant performance data are hidden from the public."

Dr. Pho suggests that to improve these sites physicians should encourage their patients to use such sites to critique their health care and health care providers. He also suggested that physicians have access to the site. Both suggestions sound reasonable. However, I disagree with his suggestion that anonymous reviews should not be allowed, because your health care information should be private. The fact that you received care from a physician is health care information which you have a right to protect.

I also agree with his suggestion that sites add performance data, which could be provided by the physician. How well a physician meets certain performance standards would be very helpful in selecting your health care provider. In the end though, prospective patients have to do their homework which may include internet searches.

The internet often has relevant and helpful information about individual physicians. Searches could include online review sites and regulatory board public information sites ([North Carolina Board of Medical Examiners](#), for instance) which Dr. Pho mentions. Other sources of information include clinic websites, on-line curriculum vitas, hospital websites, professional certification sites and a general search engine name search. Look for publications, which can often be found on the internet and specifically at publicly available sites such as PubMed, where informative medical articles are archived.

Despite the integration of the internet in the very fabric of our daily lives, you might seek word-of-mouth recommendations. Recommendations can be from current or former patients and healthcare providers including doctors, nurses and other allied health professionals. You might get those “word-of-mouth” recommendations from friends over internet social networking sites or even by texting your contact list – imagine that.