

## FALL HEALTH SUPPLEMENT

The Holiday season is behind us, and we have fallen into the familiar routine of scraping our windshields in the morning and making sure to bundle up in several jackets and scarves when you leave the house. In this Winter Health Supplement, MEDARVA Health Care addresses Part 2 of Consumer Health Care, Winter Health Tips and Diabetes.

Part 2 of Consumer Health Care continues our discussion on the importance of selecting the right doctor in these days of complex health care. We discuss the training that physicians go through and how that correlates to all of those letters you see at the end of their name. We also discuss nurse practitioners and what their role is in health care.

While you're out enjoying a few snowflakes and trying to learn how to ice skate, remember that cold weather means you have to take extra care of yourself. From advising you on how to walk on ice and snow to discussing how you can protect your eyes, these tips are great advice for how to have a healthy and safe season.

Last but not least, we discuss the all too familiar topic of diabetes. If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with diabetes, this article will help you understand how it can affect your body, from your eyes to your hands.

In future editions of **BOOMER**, we will continue these discussions of present-day health issues. As always, we invite and encourage you to share your questions, thoughts and experiences with us by writing to [MEDARVA.com](http://MEDARVA.com). Your contribution could become a useful tool for someone else.



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# Consumer Healthcare 201

Sometimes I think it's like alphabet soup – MD, PhD, DO, FACS! How do I interpret all of this when I go to pick a new doctor?

— BY EDDIE EDWARDS —

Picking a doctor is one of the most important decisions you will make for you and your family. It's a lot more complicated than finding someone your cousin Harry really likes, or who practices around the corner. There are currently 850,000 practicing physicians in the United States, nearly half of whom are primary care physicians. How do you choose?

Before you can make an informed decision about selecting a doctor, it is helpful to understand a few basic facts – and know what all of those letters really stand for!

**1. How physicians are trained.** In the U.S., doctors have a four-year bachelor's degree, followed by four years of medical school. Most states require at least one year of internship in an accredited teaching hospital setting after medical school. A three-step national exam (medical knowledge and principles, clinical skills and ability to work competently without supervision) must be successfully completed before the doctor is eligible for a license to practice medicine.

Physicians may be graduates of medical schools (*M.D.*, or medical doctor), or osteopathy schools (*D.O.*, or doctor of osteopathy), but all graduates must do the minimum internship year and pass the national examination. Doctors who have graduated from medical schools outside of the U.S. usually have additional training and licensing requirements.

*Ph.D.*, or doctors of philosophy, are often addressed as “doctor” and may participate in patient care, but they are not physicians and do not have the same clinical and medical training. They may not prescribe drugs, by law. Most Ph.D.s are researchers, but some, such as psychologists, work hand-in-hand with physicians on a daily basis. They are always specialists in their areas of expertise but are not “medical doctors.”

**2. Board certification.** Doctors may voluntarily seek to become board-certified after completing a residency; most specialists today decide to make this commitment to their patients and themselves. Each medical specialty has its own board (sometimes known as a “college”) which sets the requirements for certification. Most of the common specialties operate under the direction of the American Board of Medical Specialties.

Given the complexity of medical care in the 21st century, finding a board-certified primary-care physician or specialist may give you some added piece of mind. There are several ways you can get this information. The American Board of Medical Specialties ([abms.org](http://abms.org)) lists credentials for all certified physicians in the U.S. Certain consumer-based websites, such as [Healthgrades.com](http://Healthgrades.com) and [docboard.org](http://docboard.org), can give you that information as well. Your local or state medical society websites would also be a good resource.