

The Family Physician: Providing Your Medical Home

In an age of highly specialized medicine, people often hold the misconception that family medicine is not a specialized field. This idea could not be further from the truth. In fact, family physicians occupy a unique medical niche in our country and provide medical expertise that is equal to or exceeds that of most other specialists. Their role in both rural and urban communities in Mississippi is likely more vital than in other state. My family has experienced this firsthand, and for that I am inspired and grateful.

My parents, sister, and I have been under the care of family practitioner Richard Randolph for well over a decade. My mother has an autoimmune disease for which she sees a specialist. And of course, as a female, she sees a physician specializing in women's health. My father and I were diagnosed several years ago with a genetic muscle disorder that results in muscle wasting, severe cramping, and myalgia. As a result of the myopathy, I have been under the care of a rheumatologist since I was two years old, and my father and I both see neuromuscular specialists, as well as cardiologists. Although we all see many doctors, none of them can provide for my family what Dr. Randolph does. He is literally a "home base" for us: he sees the big picture of each individual, in terms of overall health and the effects our conditions and medications have on it. Dr. Randolph studies these disorders and makes connections that other specialists do not make because they are hyper-focused on one organ system or metabolic process.

For most of us, the family physician is the person to whom we go first when we suspect illness or disease. Most of the time, this physician can diagnose, treat, and follow us for the condition. I have marveled, as have my parents, at the range and depth of knowledge that Dr. Randolph utilizes to keep us healthy. The members of my family have thrown serious curve balls his way, and not once has been stumped.

Through routine assessments, screenings, and diagnoses, family physicians typically treat patients with diseases such as type II diabetes. The Mississippi Department of Health reported in 2016 that over 13.6% of Mississippians are living with this disease. In a state that leads the nation in type II diabetes, which puts patients at risk for a wide range of associated complications, the family physician is vital. Additionally, their vast knowledge of various illnesses and diseases equips family physicians to properly refer and connect patients with additional specialists. Family physicians have enduring relationships with families in their communities, and they are an important component in educating patients in disease prevention and maintenance of overall health.

The family physician's specialty lies in his or her wide scope of care for the entire family, and the relationships they build with their patients are unique due to the permanent nature of their support and care.