

Choosing a Hand Surgeon

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This discussion presumes that you have a hand problem and that you live in the Minneapolis / St. Paul, Minnesota metro and surrounding area. Dr. Fischer only treats hand problems. If you have a general orthopedic problem, call 952-546-OUCH, and the staff will direct you to a general orthopedist that Dr. Fischer knows and trusts, and would send his own family to. If you do not live in this area and need to find a hand surgeon, go to ASSH.org, and look in the upper right hand corner for the link that states "Find a Hand Surgeon."

Choosing the right doctor is a very important and, at times, complex problem. There is no one right way to choose a doctor, but here are some things you should consider.

Academic qualifications

The first thing to consider is the doctor's academic qualifications: is he or she board-certified in hand surgery? The highest certification that a doctor can have in hand surgery is called the Certificate of Added Qualifications in Hand Surgery. Don't hesitate to ask questions when you are choosing a doctor: it is your hand, after all! If the office does not want to answer questions about the doctor's qualifications, you do not want to go to that doctor.

Practice Type

Does the doctor do only hand surgery, or is hand surgery something they only do occasionally or in addition to other types of surgery? You can usually find this out by asking the office receptionist.

Dr. Fischer limits his practice to only hand surgery, and he does hand surgery full-time. He does not do general orthopedics, plastic surgery, or general surgery.

Is the doctor in your insurance plan's network?

You probably want to stay within your network, since it will be more expensive to see a doctor outside of your network. However, depending on how serious your problem is, or how important your hand is to your work or recreation, you may consider seeing someone outside your plan, at least for an initial consultation.

Dr. Fischer participates in a variety of health plans. If Dr. Fischer is not in your network, call the office to get an estimate of how much it might cost to go out of network. But be sure to read this entire page for important information about choosing a doctor for your hand problem.

Does the doctor within your network have any financial incentives to limit your treatment?

Many patients don't realize that many plans pay financial incentives to their participating doctors to limit the treatment that they offer to their patients, such as restricting referrals only to same-plan doctors. This is the "managed" part of "managed care." There are other, more subtle ways that managed care may affect your hand problem.

Dr. Fischer does not participate in any plans that pay financial incentives to limit patient care.

How much time will the doctor spend with you?

An interesting and insightful question when you are selecting a doctor is to ask the receptionist how much time they allot for a new patient visit or for a routine follow-up visit.

How long will you have to wait in the doctor's office?

An interesting and insightful question when you are selecting a doctor is to ask the receptionist what the average wait is for the doctor. If they don't know, it means that they haven't studied this part of their practice and you might wonder if they consider your time important. If they say the average wait is an hour or more, you know that they don't respect their patients or consider their time important.

How long will you have to wait to get an appointment?

Many patients are finding that they cannot get a timely appointment, even for an urgent matter such as a fracture.

Our office policy is that any patient with a new fracture will be seen in the office the next day we are in, whether or not there is an appointment opening. Rather than overbook the schedule, Dr. Fischer will either come in early, skip lunch, or stay late. Obviously, emergencies cannot be scheduled or be put off until it conveniently fits into the doctor's schedule, and it would not be appropriate to make other patients wait unless it was absolutely necessary.

Does the doctor have a special skill or interest in your problem?

The field of hand surgery is so broad that not all doctors have the same level of skill or interest in all problems.

*Dr. Fischer has a wide experience in standard hand problems such as fractures, carpal tunnel syndrome, trigger finger. However, he is not an expert on burns, skin grafts, congenital anomalies, or brachial plexus, and refers patients with these problems to other hand surgeons who are specialists in these fields. Be sure that **your** hand surgeon has a special skill and interest in **your** hand problem.*

We hope that these suggestions will help you in deciding if you would like to make an appointment with our office. Our number is 763-520-7870.

What Is a Hand Surgeon?

As a scientist and surgeon who has devoted his life to studying the hand, wrist, and forearm, I am always quite surprised to hear a patient say, "I have never heard of a hand surgeon! What do you do?"

Our hands serve many purposes. Hands help us eat, dress, write, earn a living, create art, and do many other activities. To do these activities, our hands require sensation and movement, such as joint motion, tendon gliding, and muscle contraction. Nerves have to fire, skin has to bend, bones have to be strong, and fingernails have to help us pick up small objects.

Hand surgeons are specialists who care for hand, wrist or arm joints, tendons, bones, muscles, nerves, skin and fingernails.

What I do is help you return your arm to normal function as fast as possible. I have had many years of specialized training in medicine. Along the way, I have had to pass rigorous exams in medicine, orthopedics, and hand surgery.

There is no other physician or health care provider who has had the specialized training and passed the rigorous exams that a true hand surgeon has.