**Maggie McKay (Host):** A primary care doctor is crucial to one's health, but why is it so important? Dr. Heather Straight, primary care physician, is here to tell us what we need to know for our wellbeing.

Welcome to Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System, Ohio. I'm your host, Maggie McKay. Thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Straight.

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Thank you for having me.

**Host:** So, let's just start off with the importance of primary care. Why do I need a primary care doctor?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** So, your primary care doctor is your first point of contact with any patient. We're kind of the gatekeepers and the medical community; the cornerstone, if you will. It's where patients start and they develop relationships that are so, so important between patients and physicians. Those are valued and that helps to lead patients in the right direction with their health.

**Host:** And for people who don't know, what's covered under primary care? What does a primary care physician do?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Primary care doctors care for infants through geriatric care, so adolescent, pediatric, adult medicine through geriatrics.

**Host:** Wow. So, there are a lot of different kinds of primary care providers, it sounds like.

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Absolutely.

**Host:** So, let's just as an example go to the pediatric one. What does that cover? What does a primary care physician do for, say, a little baby?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Primary care doctors are able to care for infants through end-of-life care. And so, some prefer to see more pediatrics than others. I personally have a very nice mix of patients from infants to children, adolescents, adults, and geriatrics.

**Host:** Have you ever had a patient that you started out when they were born and now they're like 20, 30?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** I do. And I actually have patients who I took care of as children and now I'm caring for their children.

**Host:** Ugh, do you just love that? That's got to be rewarding.

**Dr. Heather Straight:** I do. It's very special.

**Host:** How do I find a primary care physician? And then, how do I choose one? I mean, you can see a list and who takes insurance, but how do you really choose?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Sure. I think that, obviously, seeing who's local and close to you, they need to be accessible. I personally really value word of mouth. I work very hard to take care of my patients, and they in turn refer lots of new patients to me. Whoever you establish with, I think, just that first point of contact, I think patients get a feeling really quickly of whether that's a good fit for them. I think that if it's not a good fit and there's not a good connection, then important things really don't get discussed.

**Host:** And what are like the top five questions you think a patient should ask a potential primary care doctor that they're thinking of going with?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** I think that just level of comfort of care, particularly on who, you know, are you establishing, a child, an adolescent, an adult. I think that those are important questions to make sure that the primary care provider that you've chosen is truly comfortable caring for the generation that you're presenting. Certainly, ease of access is important. In our clinic, we do same-day, next-day appointments. And I'm supported by advanced practice providers that help me in shared care of patients that allows us to see patients quickly when they need to be seen. I think an emphasis on preventative medicine is an important piece to bring to the table for a good primary care doctor. So certainly, we treat disease and discomfort, but we have a primary focus on trying to improve patient lifestyles so that we can decrease risk and try to keep them healthy.

**Host:** Dr. Straight, what are the consequences of not having a primary care provider?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** I think the most important piece would be if you require treatment from several different specialists, I think that primary care providers are planted the middle, if you will. And so, we keep track. You know, the left hand knows what the right hand's doing. And so, for patients who have multiple specialists that require that level of care, it's really important to have that primary care provider to make sure that each specialist certainly is doing what they need to do. But there's a lot of crossover, if you will, in terms of medicines, care recommendations, and sometimes those conflict. And so, a primary care provider is uniquely positioned to be able to catch those things quickly and make sure the entire team is on the same page, moving in the same direction.

**Host:** I can't imagine not having a primary care physician because mine, for example, knows every single other doctor I've gone to and gets all the results every single time. What would you say to somebody who says, "ah, I don't need one. If I need a doctor, I'll go to that certain specialist"?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Sure. I usually tell my patients the best time for me to meet them is when they are well. Because if things do go south and they're not well, I really appreciate understanding, knowing what their baseline is. And so, when they're well, that's when I want to get to know them.

**Host:** How did you choose this arm of medicine? I mean, you could have gone into any department. Why primary care?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Actually, when I went to school, my ideal path was through Radiology, and I just quickly found that one of my strengths is communication and being able to establish a very good relationship with a patient. And in a very short period of time, you know, office visits are not long. And if the patient isn't comfortable with you, you often don't get to the important things as quickly as you need to. So, If you have that gifting to be able to really establish a comfortable situation with a patient, they feel comfortable with you, then they can quickly, you know, "Hey, these are the things that are really important to me that I need to get to." And oftentimes, if it's not a good fit and they don't have that level of comfort, the most important things that you need to discuss, often they're not comfortable bringing up.

**Host:** What is your favorite part about being a primary care physician?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** I love taking care of families. And I mean big family, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents. And I practice in a small community. And so often, these other family members are also patients of mine, or at least I know them in the community. And so, that's probably my favorite part.

**Host:** That's so cool. Well, in closing, is there anything else you'd like to add to somebody thinking about getting a new primary care physician and how they should go about it or why it's so important?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Sure. I think that it is so important again to just establish who is your doctor. This is the person who you form a relationship with. They know you at your best. They can quickly identify when you're not at your best and know exactly which direction to guide you in trying to become the healthiest individual that you possibly can be.

**Host:** Is there any one patient that stands out in your mind that just is so close to your heart, their story, that you remember through your whole career?

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Oh, that's hard. I have so many. I do have a very, very special lady. She is in her 90s at this point in time. And she's actually stayed with me through several moves. It's quite a drive for her at this point in time, but I have taken care of her. I've taken care of her husband. Her husband has since passed. She's just been through so much. And when she comes to see me, she always lets me know that she loves me, that she's praying for me, and feels that I have become such a treasured friend. And that's really, really special to have spent almost two decades with her and have seen her through some very, very tough times and just walking her through every stage of life and really trying to maximize her health and truly, truly developing a very special relationship.

**Host:** It sounds like you're a part of a lot of people's family. And I think that's the best either side, the patient or the doctor, can hope for when it comes to primary care.

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Absolutely.

**Host:** Thank you so much, Dr. Straight, for sharing your expertise and giving us a little window into what primary care physicians do and what it's all about.

**Dr. Heather Straight:** Thank you for having me.

**Host:** That's Dr. Heather Straight. And to find out more, please visit mhsystem.org/primarycare. And that wraps up this episode of Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System. Head on over to our website at mhsystem.org for more information and to get connected with one of our providers. Please remember to subscribe, rate, and review this podcast and all the other Memorial Health System podcasts. I'm Maggie McKay. Thanks for listening.