General Practitioners (GPs)

What is a General Practitioner (GP)?

A General Practitioner, or GP, is a medical doctor who treats acute and chronic illnesses and provides preventive care and health education to patients. GPs manage types of illness that present in an undifferentiated way at an early stage of development, which may require urgent intervention.

Role of a GP

- **Primary Care**: GPs are usually the first point of contact for patients and provide primary healthcare. They make initial diagnoses and follow up on treatment plans.
- **Preventive Care**: GPs provide immunisations and health advice to prevent diseases. They may also provide regular health check-ups, tests, and screenings.
- **Chronic Illness Management**: They manage ongoing or long-term conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, and arthritis, often coordinating care with other specialists.
- **Health Education**: GPs guide patients on diet, exercise, sleep, and other lifestyle factors affecting health.
- **Mental Health Care**: GPs often assess, treat, and manage mental health issues, referring patients to mental health specialists when necessary.
- **Coordination of Care**: If you need specialised care, your GP will refer you to a specialist and will coordinate your healthcare needs.

How are GPs trained?

In Australia, becoming a GP requires extensive training:

1. **Bachelor's Degree**: Prospective GPs first complete a Bachelor's degree, usually in health or science-related fields.
2. **Medical Degree**: Next, they undertake a four-year postgraduate medical degree (Doctor of Medicine or MD) or a six-year undergraduate medical degree (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery or MBBS).
3. **Hospital Training**: After their degree, they work in a hospital for a minimum of 12 months (internship) and often for up to three additional years (residency).
4. **General Practice Training**: They then undertake a three- to four-year GP training program run by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) or the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM).
5. **Fellowship**: Finally, they pass a rigorous exam to achieve Fellowship and registration as a GP.

How to make the most of your GP visit

- **Be Prepared**: List your symptoms, any medications you are currently taking, and any questions you want to ask.
- **Be Honest**: The more accurate information your GP has, the better they can diagnose and treat you. Don't be embarrassed—GPs are trained to deal with sensitive issues professionally.
- **Follow Up**: If your symptoms worsen or don't improve, let your GP know.
- **Chronic Disease Management Plans**: If you have a chronic medical condition, your GP may develop a management plan for you. It identifies your health and care needs, and outlines the services to be provided by your GP and others.

Please remember, your GP is a crucial part of your healthcare journey. Their comprehensive training and expertise make them well-equipped to guide you towards better health.

This information is intended for general informational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. If you have any health concerns, please see your healthcare provider.

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