

## Do I Need a Second Opinion?

– a patient story

A friend of mine had suffered from Crohn's Disease for 29 years, and it was getting worse. His weight was at an all time low, his face looked grey, and he had little energy to ride his beloved motorcycle. He had already endured multiple operations, with unsatisfactory results, so when his doctor said the only option was yet more surgery, my friend said "no thanks." Instead, he consulted a new physician, who suggested a medication he had been told would not work for him. He's been on it for a few months, and when I last saw him, he was plump, pink, and happy. He's looking forward to dancing the night away at his son's impending wedding.

And he's so glad he had the presence of mind to get a second opinion. Granted, he is an attorney, which makes him a natural advocate for himself and others. Not everyone has the personality to be comfortable seeking second opinions when it comes to their medical care. If you are in that category and you are facing a totally routine situation, you may safely "get away" with trusting a single doctor you know well. But beware of inertia. If all signs point to a second opinion as being in your best interest, why ignore them?

In deciding whether to go for a second opinion, ask yourself the following kinds of questions. Then ask a close family member or friend to look at the questions and discuss them with you.

- How serious is my condition?
- Should I get independent verification of the information?
- Is there any chance that there is a better treatment for me?
- How big an impact will this decision have on my life?
- Do I have any doubts about anything I've heard?
- How do I feel about my doctor and my interaction with him?
- What have I got to lose by seeking a second opinion?

Once you decide to go for a second opinion, you need to figure out what exactly you're hoping to get out of it. "You want an appraisal of the diagnosis you've been given and the proposed treatment," says [Craig R. Smith, MD](#), *Chairman of Surgery, Columbia University Medical Center*. "Be direct. Say, 'This is what my doctor told me about my condition. He recommends this kind of surgery. What do you think?'"

After you've reviewed your first opinion with a second, or even a third, then you will be ready to determine the most important opinion of all: yours.