

WHEN YOU WANT TO SEE A FEMALE DOCTOR



the women's
the royal women's hospital
victoria australia

In Australia fewer than one in five doctors, who specialise in women's health, are women. At the Royal Women's Hospital, the proportion is closer to one in three. Over half of our junior medical staff are women. This means that you are likely to see a female doctor at the Women's but it will not always be possible.

There are many reasons why some women will feel more comfortable with a female doctor or health carer, especially when they are pregnant, when they wish to discuss sexual health matters or when it is necessary to have a vaginal examination.

This fact sheet will explain why it is not always possible to have a female doctor.

Can I see the female doctor who is on duty today?

When you come for your appointment you may notice that there are female doctors on duty and you may wonder if it is possible to have your visit with them.

Usually it is not possible because each day we organise our medical teams so that care can be given as safely and promptly as possible to all women who are attending the clinics. All our doctors are rostered according to their skills and experience and each doctor is scheduled to see a certain number of patients.

There may be a female doctor on duty but she will have a group of patients that she is scheduled to see. If she is called away from her scheduled patients she could be putting the health of other patients at risk. Our patients receive the best care when all doctors are able to perform their rostered duties.

All our doctors, male and female, and our students are trained to be respectful and to treat your personal information confidentially. Doctors are also trained to understand and respect the concerns some women may have about cultural and gender issues.

All our male and female doctors receive the same training, so are equally prepared to provide you with excellent care.

When will it be possible to see a female doctor?

We **cannot** meet a request for a female doctor in these places:

- Birthing suites
- Operating theatres: this includes elective surgery
- Emergency

We **cannot always** meet a request to see a female doctor in these situations:

- If a woman has a medical problem requiring specialist care. There may only be one doctor available with the right skills and experience to care for you.
- If you have an urgent need for an appointment or care.
- If a doctor is called away for an emergency or is on sick leave.

We are **usually able** to meet a request to see a female health professional in these situations:

- **Pregnant women with no health problems** can usually have most of their care during pregnancy with midwives, most of whom are female. However, if complications arise, it will be necessary to see the most appropriate doctor on duty.
- **Women who are prepared to wait longer** for an appointment to see a female doctor, but only a limited number of these appointments can be reserved.

These appointments usually need to be made well in advance and even then, for any number of reasons; the doctor may not be available on the day.

Please note that this will sometimes apply to other health care workers as well.

When you are worried about having a vaginal (internal) examination

Many women will not need to have a vaginal examination, especially for pregnancy check-ups. Ask the midwives how likely it is that you will need a vaginal examination.

You can choose not to have a vaginal examination although sometimes it is the only way for a doctor to understand your problem. It is important that the same person you talk to about your health concerns also does the vaginal examination.

If you do need to have a vaginal examination, you are able to have another person with you. This may be a friend or relative, a midwife or other female staff member.

Remember

Although we can sometimes meet your request for a female doctor, it is important that you know that we cannot guarantee a female doctor at every appointment.

You will need to advise us well in advance of each of your appointments if you wish to see a female doctor.

Finally

If you have any concerns about your care, have experienced any problems, or if you have any suggestions on ways we can improve our care or the training our staff or students receive, you can contact the Consumer Liaison Office to discuss your concern. Consumer Liaison Office are able to help you with any concerns you may have about hospital staff or your care while attending the hospital. The Consumer Liaison Office can be contacted by phone on (03) 8345 2290 or (03) 8345 2291.

You can also call Language Services and ask for their assistance in speaking with the Consumer Liaison Office. Call (03) 8345 3054.