Some people find that asking a doctor about getting a second opinion can be very difficult. They feel that the question about a second opinion shows a lack of trust in the doctor/patient relationship. Some people are afraid that it will hurt the doctor’s feelings, and some even believe that the doctor might try to retaliate in some way. These are normal fears. However, they are, for the most part, unfounded.

Most doctors actually welcome the opportunity to have a second opinion. There is no better defense from a malpractice suit than having a medical colleague who is on record as agreeing with a doctor’s determined course of action. Also, doctors are human. They are sometimes uncertain, and most are glad to have the reinforcement that comes from a second opinion.

The important thing, however, is not how the doctor feels about a second opinion, it is how you feel about the proposed course of treatment. Here are a few circumstances in which you might want to get a second opinion:

- If your doctor has not discussed alternatives to a recommended course of treatment with you, and seems reluctant to do so, you need to get a second opinion. There are always alternatives, and rarely is a clinical situation so straightforward that the alternatives are completely without merit.
- If your doctor has fully explained your diagnosis and the alternatives available and you are still uncertain what to do, you might want to get a second opinion to help you decide.
- If you have had a thorough discussion, and have made an informed decision, but your doctor seems uncomfortable with your choice, you might want to get a second opinion to see if there is something you may have misunderstood.
- Occasionally, patients are referred to surgeons with great reputations but with less than adequate “people skills.” The result is the patient may be confident but still is just not comfortable. The patient should never hesitate to seek a second opinion even if the reason is to be more comfortable with your surgeon.
- For many reasons, some patients or their family members think the only place to get medical care for serious or complicated conditions is a highly respected specialty facility, such as the Mayo Clinic for example. If you ask your surgeon about such care and he or she does not openly and professionally discuss it as a viable option, get a second opinion. Patients need to know the best opportunity to cure or solve the problem surgically is the first time. Patients who think they are getting the best usually have few second thoughts.

There is an old medical axiom that says, “Measure twice, cut once.” If you think you need a second opinion, you do. At BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, we believe that an informed patient is the best patient.