# why diagnoses go

and what you can do about it

A Q&A with Best Doctors' Vice-Chairman, Evan Falchuk

# Q: If someone asked you to explain in 20 seconds what Best Doctors does, how would you answer?

A: We are turning traditional notions of health care on their head. In today's confusing maze of a health care system, we get people the right answers to their medical guestions. We do this in lots of different ways, but all of it involves figuring out what is actually wrong, asking the right questions, and getting the right answers from the world's best expert physicians. Today, we serve 30 million members around the world, and we believe that through our work we are on our way to changing health care

# Q: Can you give us an example of a case where Best Doctors corrected a diagnosis?

A: My favorite example is close to home — my own brother. Brad. He's the co-creator of the TV show "Glee." and before coming to Best Doctors, he was incorrectly diagnosed with a malignant tumor in his spinal cord. His doctors had scheduled him for radiation and surgery to get rid of the tumor, which is actually the right thing to do for that kind of condition. The trouble is, that wasn't the condition he had.

So we reviewed all of his medical information and family medical history, and our doctors found a clue that ended up being lifesaving for him. It turned out we have a family history of a condition that could easily be confused for a malignant tumor. Best Doctors recommended some additional tests, which confirmed that he didn't have a tumor at all. The treatment that was originally planned was in fact very dangerous, given his actual condition. Today, having received both the right diagnosis and right treatment from Best Doctors, he is doing great. What's amazing about my brother's case is that stories like his are more common than most of us think.

Our U.S. data from 2011 showed 29% of people had been misdiagnosed, while 60% required a change in treatment.

# Q: The public is starting to hear more about how often people are misdiagnosed, and about getting second opinions. In this day and age, why is misdiagnosis happening so often in the

A: Doctors today are the best educated and best trained than at any time in history. They have the best technology out there, and every year more and more treatments are available. So how can misdiagnoses still happen? The problem, we believe, is in how our health care system works. Doctors sometimes have to see 30 or more patients a day, and often can spend only 15 minutes or less with each one. What's happening is that doctors and patients just don't have the time together that they need to ask all the right questions, and make the best decisions. It's why we believe that misdiagnosis is a public health problem that doesn't get the attention it absolutely deserves.

### Q: How long has Best Doctors been around? What was the genesis of the company?

A: Best Doctors has been doing this work for almost 25 years. My father is one of the founders. He is an internist and professor of medicine and saw the problem of quality in medicine from his work as a doctor. He knew that as a doctor and a teacher he could only reach so many people. His vision in creating Best Doctors was to reach millions more. It's inspiring to be part of a team that is making this vision a reality.



# WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO AVOID BEING **MISDIAGNOSED?**

- 1. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You should never be a spectator in your own care. It's your health, and your life.
- 2. Always get a second opinion and focus on sharing your symptoms, rather than the diagnosis you received from your initial treating doctor.
- **3.** Take the time to get to know your family medical history and make sure your doctor knows about it.
- **4.** Take someone with you to your doctor's visits to help listen, take notes, and ask questions.
- 5. If you've been diagnosed with a type of cancer, always have your pathology re-checked.

## Q: What makes doctors the "Best?" How does Best Doctors choose its physicians?

A: We think the very best doctors are the ones who make good, thoughtful decisions. Now, one way to do this would be to watch every doctor practice, but obviously that's not practical. So what we set out to do over two decades ago was ambitious and game-changing. We wanted to ask doctors all across the country, and across all of the many specialty areas of medicine who, in their experience, they thought were the best at what they do. It's a little bit like what doctors do themselves when they look for doctors — they ask their peers for their honest perspective.

Today, we have assembled a respected database of nearly 50,000 doctors that represent the top 5% of doctors across 45 specialties and more than 400 subspecialties of medicine. It's an incredibly powerful tool. And it's completely independent. Doctors can never pay to get on our Best Doctors in America list, nor are they (or we) ever paid if they're voted on to the list. The only way to be on the list is for their peers, the best in their fields, to name them to it. It is, in fact, a singular honor to be a Best Doctor.

# Q: What would you give as the #1 reason why Best Doctors continues its efforts to improve health care?

A: The biggest reason why we come to work each day at Best Doctors is because we believe everyone should get the right care. While most people get the right care, far, far too many people still do not. There isn't an easy way to fix the health care system, but we know we don't need to wait for that — we can help people through our approach and physicians' expertise today, and so we do.

## Q: What can people do to avoid being misdiagnosed?

A: The best thing you can do is to ask guestions. You should never be a spectator in your own care. Ask why your doctor thinks your diagnosis is right. Find out what else could be

causing your problems. Don't be afraid to ask — it's your health, and your life.

If you're going to get surgery or you have a serious illness, always get a second opinion. Making sure you are comfortable that you understand what is happening and what is being planned for you is a really important way to avoid problems. Focus on telling your second-opinion doctor all of your symptoms, rather than influencing her thinking right off the bat by repeating what your first doctor said you have.

Take the time to get to know your family medical history and make sure your doctor knows about it.

It's hard to listen to difficult medical news and pay close attention to details at the same time, so take someone with you to doctor's visits to help listen, take notes, and ask questions.

If you've been diagnosed with a type of cancer, always have your pathology re-checked. If you had a biopsy and your diagnosis is based on your original pathology report, be sure to get it reviewed again.

We all have the power to make a real difference in our own care or that of a loved one.

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