

Executive Health Expert Answers Your Questions

By Susan Locke, M.D.

Medical Director, Healthnetwork Foundation

Healthnetwork is an advocate of preventive medicine and Executive Physicals. Over the years, we have received many questions about these programs, so we turned to **Donald D. Hensrud, M.D., M.P.H.**, (pictured) who is the Chair, Division of Preventive, Occupational, and Aerospace Medicine at **Mayo Clinic** in Rochester, Minnesota, for answers.

1) *What are the benefits of the executive physical programs vs. the “physical” I get locally from my own physician?*

There are many excellent primary care providers and the relationship with your primary care provider is extremely important for ongoing management of chronic conditions and new health issues as they arise. Having said that, Executive Health programs may offer some advantages. Many primary care providers have a limited amount of time to see you and it might be challenging to take a comprehensive look at your overall health. Executive Health programs vary, but many offer increased time with the patient to look at all health care issues. In the Mayo Clinic Executive Health program we evaluate all existing medical problems and investigate any new symptoms. In addition, we perform individual health promotion counseling and appropriate screening tests are scheduled automatically. Thus, this is a very comprehensive evaluation. In addition, time is important for busy executives and we preschedule tests to arrange a very efficient

itinerary, accomplishing a lot in just a day or two. Finally, for specific medical problems we can refer to any subspecialty to get the best treatment recommendations, usually in a timely manner.



2) *How often do you find “something”?*

We're currently involved in a study in our program that is evaluating this. Occasionally we find something very serious - and if you're the person we find that on, it can be vitally important for your health. Just as important, we find various issues that can improve health in virtually everyone, and many of these things may potentially make a large difference in long-term health.

3) *How do you choose which tests I may need?*

Testing may vary among Executive Health Programs. For routine screening tests in the Mayo Clinic Executive Health Program, we don't do the bare minimum tests, nor do we do every possible test (which may only waste money without any likely benefit). We review current guidelines and determine a clinical testing schedule based on what we believe is best for the patient. We then take those baseline screening recommendations and tailor it to the patient based on their risk factors. For example, if someone has a family history of colon cancer we may start screening at an earlier age than usual.

If someone is having any symptoms, we also tailor the testing for that patient to evaluate those symptoms.

4) *How will healthcare reform impact Executive Health programs?*

There still is a lot of uncertainty about the specifics of healthcare reform, including the area of coverage for highly compensated individuals, such as executives. It is possible Executive Health coverage may change. Up to now only self-insured plans could not discriminate favorably toward highly compensated individuals. Healthcare reform currently extends these nondiscrimination rules to fully insured medical plans that are not grandfathered in. If not followed, there could be large excise tax penalties on these plans for employers. How this will be interpreted and applied is not entirely clear.

5) *When do I get my results?*

We see patients at the completion of their evaluation and go over the test results, consultations, and recommendations. We also send a letter to the patient with all of this information. In some cases there may be follow-up recommendations that can be completed locally. We consider ourselves a partner in our patient's healthcare - with the patient and with their primary care provider. When the patient comes back to our program, we schedule any needed follow-up tests.

6) *What happens when you find "something?" Do I stay on for more tests?*

When we find a medical issue, we try to evaluate it right away with appropriate further

tests or consultations. At Mayo Clinic, we have a very integrated system for doing that. For less urgent issues, the decision is up to the patient. They may choose to go home for further testing or return for any recommended tests.

7) *What is the follow up with Executive Health Program providers?*

Many of our patients return yearly or every other year for this comprehensive evaluation. When they do that, we will schedule their appointment with the same provider whenever possible for continuity. If a significant medical issue arises in between visits we will see the patient and evaluate and treat the issue.

8) *Should I be asking for the latest technology I read about? Genetics profile? Full body scan?*

Yes, my goal is to have all my patients' questions answered by the time they leave. Many of these tests are controversial, and there may not be a black-and-white answer. I would encourage you to have an open discussion with your physician about whether some of these tests may be useful for you.

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If you have questions or if you would like a referral to one of our Executive Health programs, please call:

866-968-2467 or 440-893-0830.