

AUGUST:

TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR

How are you at communicating with your healthcare provider? Do you feel like he or she is speaking a foreign language? Are you comfortable asking questions, or saying “I don’t understand...can you tell me in plainer language...”?

Your relationship with your provider affects the care you get! How well you communicate – *that means listening as well as talking* – with each other is critical to your getting the best possible care, in reasonable time, and at a fair price. Here are some simple pointers to make your conversations with your provider more effective:

PLAN AHEAD... know ahead of time what you intend to discuss with your doctor, whether it’s a specific problem or your annual physical exam.

- Carry a written list of questions, and bring a list of symptoms if you’re not feeling well.
- Remember to bring a list of all the medications you use– jot down the doses and how often you use them – include vitamins, minerals and herbal supplements! (It’s helpful to the doctor to know what you’ve tried and how well medications, hot packs or ice packs, etc. have worked to relieve symptoms.)
- Have your insurance card and any medical records (or have them sent in advance) if you’re seeing the doctor for the first time. Take a copy of your advance directive (or ask the doctor’s office for the forms so you can prepare one!)

One expert notes “Many people were brought up on ‘old medical manners’ – that is, to be ‘good patients’. Being polite was more important in the doctor’s office than in church! But the days of ‘doctor knows best’ are waning, and the relationship is more about interaction.”

SPEAK UP!... don’t be put off by big words and don’t withhold information!

- It is important to tell your doctor accurate information, even the personal stuff – being embarrassed or uncomfortable is no excuse for outright lies, “stretching the truth” or omitting information – it may be very costly in arriving at the correct diagnosis and the best treatment. The more honest you are, the better your doctor can help you!
- Don’t waste the doctor’s time (or yours!) asking irrelevant questions: your uncle’s medical problem can’t be diagnosed unless he’s being examined and tested... stick to your reason for being there!
- If you don’t understand what the doctor is telling you, ask him/her to explain it again, using different words, drawing a picture or doing whatever it takes! Don’t leave the doctor’s office without understanding every-

thing you’ve been told, and don’t agree to treatments or tests that haven’t been explained to you.

- If you feel rushed or worried about decisions, share those feelings with the doctor: “I don’t feel comfortable making a decision until I understand this better... I need more time...”

LISTEN AND TAKE NOTES... on the doctor’s analysis of your problem, and what you need to do to rectify it!

- Bring notepad and pen with you, make notes about terms that you wish to research – knowing some related medical terms and common treatments will make it easier to follow instructions (e.g., taking medications correctly) and participate in planning your care.
- You may want to bring someone along to help you ask questions and take notes... this person can also help you understand explanations and remember details later.



FOLLOW THROUGH... your responsibility in the health care delivery partnership means (for example) taking the prescribed medicine when, and as long as the doctor ordered (don’t stop when you begin to feel better, and – for heaven’s sake! – don’t share it with other people who are complaining of similar symptoms)...if you’re not going to follow the doctor’s orders, be honest and explain why... Keep followup appointments, and keep lines of communication open... you should have confidence and trust in his or her medical ability and judgment. If not, you might need to entrust your care to someone else.

Most capable doctors will agree that they learn from their patients all the time, just as a good teacher learns from his students. A skillful doctor treats the patient as the captain of the ship, and himself as the navigator – remember, playing an active role in your own health care places the responsibility for reliable communication with your provider squarely on you!

For more information about communicating effectively with your healthcare providers, go to

http://www.aarp.org/health/staying_healthy/prevention/a2003-03-13-talkdr.html

<http://medicalwisdom.com/articles/how-to-get-the-best-medical-care/15.htm>

<http://www.ahrq.gov> “Quick Tips When Talking with Your Doctor”

<http://www.latimes.com/features/health/la-he-lying8-2009jun08.0.6824072>

“Body of Lies: Patients aren’t 100% honest with doctors”

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