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## Creating an Optimal Health Care Team: Medical Professional, Your Loved-One, and You – the Caregiver

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Many family caregivers welcome the opportunity to accompany their loved-ones to medical appointments. If the caregiver is present in the examination room with the loved-one, the caregiver can insure that the medical professional receives clear and concise information about the loved-one's condition. Sometimes, though, communication breaks down. Here are some ideas that may help the caregiver, loved-one and the medical professional get the most from the appointment.

### What factors contribute to poor communication between patient and doctor?



- **Limited time.** Because patient visits often last less than 15 minutes, there is little time devoted to discussing the types of medications prescribed and how to take them.
- **Medical Terms.** Frequently doctors use unfamiliar medical terms that patients may not fully understand. This can result in miscommunication as well as frustration, especially for the patient.
- **Patient Hesitation or Discomfort.** Patients may feel uncomfortable asking questions or may hesitate to ask questions because they are not certain what to ask.

### How to prepare for a doctor's visit:

Remember, your loved-one is the expert when it comes to noting the changes in his/her body. The caregiver plays an important role too and can add a valuable perspective. It is the patient's responsibility to give the doctor enough information to diagnose problems and prescribe the proper treatment.

- Before the visit, write down information that the doctor needs to know.
- Write a list of questions about the health condition or the treatment.
- Bring all the medications the loved-one takes to the doctor's office.
- Bring a note pad and pen/pencil so the caregiver can write down what the doctor says. Notes make it easier to remember the details.

### What information the doctor needs:

- **The health concerns.** Be prepared to explain changes in bodily functions - for example, changes in sleep and bowel habits, headaches, pain, or fatigue. Be clear and specific.
- **Allergies.** Remind the doctor about any allergies the loved-one has to medications, foods, and other substances. Describe the reactions that were experienced.
- **Adverse medication reactions.** If the loved-one has ever experienced a negative reaction to a medication (i.e., hives or upset stomach) be sure the doctor understands what happened.



- **All medications currently taking.** Tell the doctor about all the medications the loved-one takes - even those that do not require a prescription, such as aspirin and laxatives. Share this information with each professional providing medical care. This way one can avoid a duplication of medications or be prescribed a medication that adversely interacts with others.
- **Other medicinal items.** Be sure to share information about any other items the loved-one is taking such as herbs, vitamins, or mineral supplements.
- **Caffeine and alcohol intake.** List the amount of coffee, tea, soft drinks, and alcohol the loved-one consumes in an average day.
- **Tobacco habits.** Inform the doctor about the amount of tobacco the loved-one uses daily, such as the number of cigarettes or cigars, the number of times the loved-one smokes a pipe or chews tobacco each day.

### **What the caregiver and loved-one should do at the doctor's office:**

- **Be persistent.** If the doctor does not have time to answer questions, ask for someone who can. Answering questions is part of the doctor's responsibility. There may be other health professionals in the office who focus on education and information.
- **Speak up!** If you do not understand say so. Tell the doctor if you do not understand the words he or she uses. You have a right to information about your health and prescription medications, in language that is familiar to you.
- **Write it down.** During your visit, write down what the doctor tells you about your condition and what he or she is prescribing for treatment.
- **Before you leave.** Review the information you are given with either the doctor or another health care professional to be sure you understand and all of your questions have been asked.

**Remember:** Once you leave the doctor's office, the caregiver and the loved-one are responsible for obtaining medications, using them as instructed, and reporting any problems. By openly communicating, the loved-one, caregiver and the doctor can work together to maintain your loved-one's good health.

