

## More Tips on Communicating with a Doctor

Sometimes physicians “forget” that the patient is the consumer of health services. As a consumer, you have:



- The right to a clear diagnosis,
- The right to have conditions explained, and
- The right to know all risks involved in taking a new medication and/or in accepting a medical procedure such as surgery or diagnostic tests.

Also, many patients feel that the doctor is responsible for their health. Nothing could be further from the truth!

One’s health care is a shared venture. The doctor, the loved-one and the caregiver each have specific responsibilities. The loved-one (with the help from the caregiver) is responsible for informing the doctor of a health condition and for following the course of treatment prescribed. The physician is responsible for

diagnosing the health condition correctly and prescribing an effective and reasonable course of treatment. The caregiver is responsible for being the loved-one’s advocate. The following are suggestions on how best manage the relationship with health care providers.

- 1) Be frank with the physician. He or she needs to know exactly why the loved-one is in the office. This is no time for being embarrassed.
- 2) Stick to the problem at hand. Do not confuse the doctor with irrelevant details. (Example of what not to do: "The pain started when I went shopping with my daughter. You know, my daughter just bought this beautiful new car..." )
- 3) Tell the physician upfront that there is a list of questions that need answers. Often, asking questions slows a physician down. The physician should spend at least one-half hour with patients.
- 4) Ask the physician for any written information about the present health condition. Often, booklets will answer many questions and offer reassurance about what needs to be done.
- 5) Have the physician write down the name of the health condition in medical terms as well as explain the health condition in layman's terms. The medical names can be checked later in medical reference books (available in most public libraries) or through the internet websites.
- 6) If a physician appears annoyed with questions, frankly tell the doctor that it is important to understand precisely what is wrong and how best to follow the recommended care plan. Do not apologize to the doctor for taking up time.

- 7) If the physician wants diagnostic testing done, he / she should be able to explain why the test is necessary. He / she should also describe how the procedure is done, what patients should expect, what will be learned from the results, what risks are associated with the test, and why the test is justified.
- 8) If the physician prescribes medications, have him/her explain when to take the medicine, how much to take, and any precautions (for example, causes sleepiness) or recommendations (for example, needs to be taken with food) associated with the medication.
- 9) Doctors may prescribe medications because patients want "something" done for their condition. In many cases, medications are not necessary. Drugs always have an effect on the human body.
- 10) Be polite but persistent. Remember you and your doctor form a team based on mutual respect and trust. You are both human beings. Value each other.

