

Partnering Up with your Healthcare Providers

BY CHRIS ROKOSH



DID YOU KNOW that there are ways for you to get better care from your healthcare providers? Here's what happened to me yesterday. I had a two o'clock appointment with my doctor to renew a prescription. I left the office late, fought my way through traffic, had trouble finding a parking spot, sat frustrated in the waiting room, was rushed through an appointment that lasted exactly seven minutes, and left without getting my prescription renewed. By the time I got home, it had taken me two and a half hours to accomplish absolutely nothing. I was a hot, sweaty, frustrated, cranky mess, wondering how and where things went so wrong. Does this sound familiar? Rather than accepting this as the way things are, or blaming the experience on your doctor, let's look at some ways to improve the somewhat complex, but necessary relationship with healthcare providers.

♦ **First of all, courtesy, kindness and professionalism go a long way.** Both patients and doctors place a high value on being respected and heard. Take the long-term view on this. Make the effort to find a healthcare practitioner that you like and trust. Work on building a relationship with them. You will get the best care from healthcare providers who know you, understand you and respect you.

♦ **Expect that the office will be busy and that the healthcare provider will be pressed for time.** Rather than feel pre-emptively angry and frustrated,

accept this as a fact. Bring something along to pass the time in the waiting room. Prepare yourself to navigate the average 15 minute appointment like a professional. Have succinct notes, copies of your prescriptions, your questions ready and arrive with good knowledge of both your current problems and past health history.

♦ **Bring some backup when you're really not feeling well.** This is particularly important when you're not in your 'right mind'; when you're worried or frightened about a potential diagnosis or are seeking treatment for anxiety or depression. Your support person can ask the important questions and write down the vital answers.

♦ **Do your research intelligently.** While the majority of patients find internet research helpful, only a small percentage of physicians support this idea. If you're going to do some research rely on reputable government websites and associations such as the Canadian Cancer Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Stay away from sites that are fueled by advertisers or that guide you to a specific drug or treatment. Although you may arrive at the appointment with a reasonable suspicion of your diagnosis and treatment, remain open and respectful to what your healthcare provider has to say.

♦ **Ask questions until you understand both the diagnosis and the treatment plan.** Don't remain silent through the appointment and leave

angry or confused. Being courteous and respectful doesn't mean you have to be passive. Take an active role in your treatment and assume the responsibility to find out what you need to know.

♦ **Consider keeping a set of health records for yourself.** These can be

very informal and include a list of allergies, current and past medical conditions, dates of appointments, tests and treatments, names of doctors and specialists and which treatments have and have not worked for you. This is particularly helpful if you or a loved one has a recurring or chronic health condition.

♦ **Finally, follow your healthcare providers' recommendations for treatment.** Noncompliance can significantly affect both your health and your relationship with your provider. The advice you're given might be much more than taking a pill. It might include self-care and lifestyle recommendations such as watching your diet, getting more exercise, reducing stress and quitting smoking. It's important that you do your part so that your healthcare provider can do theirs – because when you feel better, everybody feels better. On the other hand, if you experience serious side effects, the treatment isn't effective, or you're not sure that you're following instructions correctly, contact your healthcare provider and let them know.

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