

Your Treatment: Get Involved...the right way! *

The times, they are changing for sure. Another example is the way we, as patients, now see the medical profession and relate to our physicians. I still remember my parents and grandparents blindly surrendering their health and life to the doctor, having placed him on a pedestal lower than God, but definitely higher than everyone else.

Nowadays, the trend leads us to research, question, and direct our medical care providers, sometimes at the cost of alienating them, treating ourselves incompetently and sabotaging our health.

Getting patients involved in their care, and keeping them on board is crucial to making a treatment or health protocol successful. Non-compliance is a big issue, resulting in botched results, uncertain futures, increased risks of complications or aggravation and waste of resources, especially financial. Yet, many patients are turned off by the perceived arrogance and lack of listening skills that too many physicians exhibit. Faced with derision, rejection or dismissal, they might hinder chances at a successful cure by not reporting potential important health facts or even stopping treatment.

So, is there a middle way?

There must be, as many are achieving it. Working side to side, many patients have learned to listen and profit from the wisdom and experience that comes in a white coat, while expressing feedback, preferences and questions in a process based on mutual respect and acceptance.

1. Research is necessary

Getting the facts straight is the first step toward a successful outcome.

Before making or agreeing to any treatment, it always is recommended that patients get acquainted with their diagnosis, its health repercussions, all course of action options, costs and rates of success.

General information and fact sheets can be obtained from government-based health websites, from private organizations focusing on this condition and from fact sheets published by teaching universities or medical associations. These will get you started:

- <http://health.nih.gov/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthtopics.html>

2. Questions are essential

You should evaluate the impact on your daily life by asking your physician how this diagnosis personally affects you.

Ask about each treatment, its risks and benefits. What are the expected results, side effects and severity?

How will you know a treatment is working? What would it take to recognize a change of regimen is necessary? What is the timetable for any lab, test or imaging?

What is the expected cost? Are there generic alternatives or free samples for oral medications? Using an equivalent but less expensive option might be beneficial if anxiety and stress due to financial concerns are lowered.

Comparing options will help guide you and your physician to take the most appropriate decision.

If you have doubts, or decide treatment is not for you, it is your right to express your views. If your doctor disagrees, it will be indicated in his report, but you should nonetheless receive the supportive measures, palliative care, pain management or other modalities you might require. While some physicians still dismiss patients who refuse to endorse a prescribed treatment, they might soon become dinosaurs.

You might consider seeking a second opinion. Your insurance can refer you to another specialist. Try and see another physician outside of your current MD's medical group or practice, as colleagues would almost never contradict each other. Most policies cover the cost of a second opinion consultation.

3. Communicate and participate



Once you have made an informed choice, possess all the necessary information and facts, and understand what constitutes an emergency and what is to be expected, ongoing communication with your doctor is of utmost importance.

Indicate any change, sudden onset or new indications or aggravations. Monitor side effects; report any symptom outside the established norm. Consult the office about unexpected reactions, or any possible interaction with newly prescribed drugs. Mention supplements and alternative medicine remedies you might want to include in your treatment.

Make sure you keep your scheduled appointments, and that your medication list is up to date.

In conclusion:

In these days of hurried physicians, brief appointment times and packed schedules, responsibility falls on patients to take a more active role in their care. Working as a team has been shown to lower the risk of medical errors, encourage patient participation and involvement, boost compliance and bring about more successful outcomes. A balanced dialogue can also reduce costs, lower stress and build trust. All are encouraging signs that old habits might be changing for the better.

* as seen on NerdWallet

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