

# Smart Patient, Healthy Patient

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As consumers in the medical market place, we need to be aware of what we can do to ensure that the medical care and treatment that we receive is appropriate and correct. We must proceed from the basis that not only are our healthcare providers charged with providing good care, but we as patients must do everything that we possibly can to ensure a good outcome in a medical situation. The following are some recommendations which can save lives.

On visiting a physician for the first time, it is always recommended that you bring with you any prior medical records. Do not leave it to the physician to get your medical chart from your prior treating physician.

Make a list of all of the medications and herbal supplements which you take as well as the names and phone numbers of all other treating physicians. This saves time and helps your physician get a clear picture of your current treatment.

- If you are going to a physician's office and tests are being taken, find out what the office policy is regarding test results. Do they send you a letter in the mail advising you of what your test results were, do they call you with the test results, or do they tell you that they will only call you if something is abnormal? If they tell you that they will send you a notice in the mail, or will call you, then you need to diary for yourself a reminder concerning those test results. If you do not receive them in a specific time then you need to make a phone call to the doctor's office and find out what happened to those results. If they tell you that you will only hear from them if the results are abnormal, that is not acceptable. In that situation, you need to be an active patient and call within a reasonable time to determine what your test results were.
- When going to a physician, it is also important to make a list of all of the questions that you may have as well as all of your complaints. It is also important that you be open and honest with your physician as to what brought you to the doctor's office. Taking the attitude that "if there is something wrong with me, the doctor will find it" is just unacceptable. We all know our own bodies and if we feel that there is something wrong, we must bring it to the physician's attention so that he/she can focus on the issue and do an appropriate exam along with an appropriate differential diagnosis to rule in or rule out various conditions. Your annual check-up is aimed at preventing illness. But if you are experiencing symptoms, make an appointment, do not wait for your yearly examinations to bring these symptoms to your doctor's attention.
- Don't be afraid to get a second opinion. A second opinion is always a good idea in a situation where surgery is recommended. A second opinion is also a good idea in the situation where as a patient you feel something is wrong and your physician is telling you that he/she cannot find anything wrong, or if symptoms do not improve despite treatment. In that case, you should always take all of your records with you for that second opinion. If you have had radiological studies done, you should obtain a copy of those studies and bring

them to the new physician so that he/she can have them looked at by people he/she relies upon.

- Pathological results are not infallible. In a situation regarding biopsies, physicians rendering second opinions will often require that any pathology specimens be obtained from the lab where they were performed and re-read by the facility rendering the second opinion. You as a knowledgeable patient/consumer when getting a second opinion concerning treatment for a cancer diagnosis should have that pathology re-read by the facility where your second opinion physician intends to treat. If there is any discrepancy, further testing and evaluations can then be performed.
- As far as PAP smear slides are concerned, in the event that a slide comes back as a positive, most physicians will repeat that test which can be done quickly and inexpensively so as to verify the findings or go on to further testing. On the other hand, in the face of symptoms and if a PAP smear comes back negative, it is imperative that the physician go further and either repeat the test or perform further diagnostic testing such as a colposcopy and transvaginal sonogram.

Remember, doctors are not infallible. Doctors' office systems are not mistake proof. We as medical consumers must be proactive when dealing with our most precious commodity - our lives and the lives of our loved ones.



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