

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



October, 2012

National Primary Care Week

Despite technologic advances, the most powerful medical intervention we have is still a trusting, caring relationship between you and your doctor. You get the best care when you and your doctor work well together as a team. Historically the interactions between doctor and patient have been patriarchal, like those between a parent and a child. But now, that relationship is evolving into a team effort.

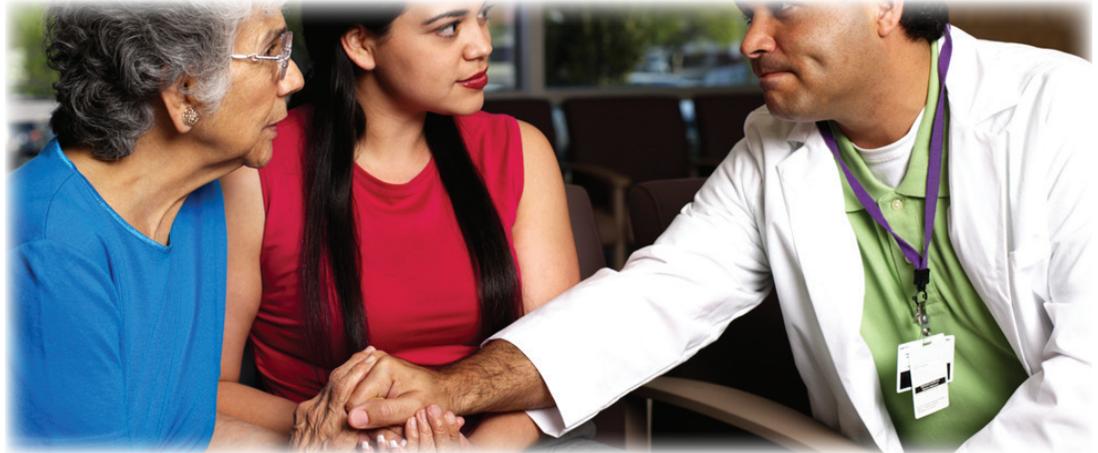
Caregiving Is A Two-Way Street

Not too long ago, caregivers and loved ones would come into the doctor's office with lines of questioning that began with "What should we do?" More often these days we're hearing conversations starting with "Do you think we should?" Sometimes these questions even include treatment options that are insightful. Occasionally it's even a treatment option that physicians with framed degrees and everything had not considered.

Smart patients and their caregivers can't be passive. You need to be a first-rate Sherlock Holmes, asking intelligent questions and having the instincts (and guts) to politely challenge things you don't understand.

Help your Doctor Help You

You don't need to know all the tech-



nical, medical details about a health problem, but you should find out the basics. As a caregiver you no doubt will be leading the team of physicians and health care experts —working together as savvy detectives charged with interpreting even the tiniest clues to come up with a diagnosis and a treatment plan.

Did you know that more than 80 percent of health problems can be diagnosed by the information the patient provides his or her doctor? So how much information is enough? Before your appointment, ask questions of your friend or loved one to get as thorough an understanding of the symptoms as possible.

How you educate yourself, explain facts, ask questions, and lead your loved one's health care team is crucial in a caregiving situation where the actual patient may not be totally capable of communicating with their health care providers on their own.

Make the communication a two-way street.

Finding The Right Doctor

Powerful allies in your role as a caregiver are the team members you recruit. Your entire health team—which includes your loved one, doctors, nurses, specialists, pharmacists, family members and you—works together on behalf of someone who, in many cases, is not able to make their own healthcare decisions. Your loved one's primary care physician will probably be the team's "coach" so as the team manager be sure you're comfortable working with him or her and have great confidence in his/her abilities.

What to Look for in a Doctor

After creating your short list of potential candidates, think about what you and your loved one need from a primary care doctor. Ask yourself and

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your loved one (if you are able to communicate with him or her about these decisions) the following questions:

- Would you and your loved one prefer a male or female doctor?
- Someone younger or older?
- Is location a factor?
- Who else is in the group and how does the group handle situations after hours?
- Will all the group doctors have access to your loved one's medical records, or are the doctors working independently?
- How long does it typically take to get an appointment?
- What is the cost of an office visit?

Meeting The Right Doctor

Two final questions should help you decide if you've chosen well. How does your loved one react to the doctor? Lastly, what does your gut feeling tell you? Caregivers sometimes have the added burden of choosing on behalf of another, but among all the important considerations, knowledge and experience are the primary qualifications for helping choose the right doctor for you and your loved one.

Getting The Right Information About A Diagnosis And Medication

What do you do if you and your loved one have different "optimal doses" of information? You want as much information as possible...but your Dad doesn't, or, Mom is in the library all day researching her condition, whereas the doctor's brief overview is enough for you. What to do?

The answer is simple, though not always so simply accomplished; get the

right information. Information treats two of the most painful conditions in medicine - fear and confusion.

What Dose of Information?

You need to take the proper dose of medication to get its full benefits. Take too little and your symptoms persist; take too much and you can get a toxic response. Each individual has an optimal dose of information.

Here are some tips if you and your loved one need different doses of information:

Remember that your loved one is the patient. Be sensitive to the optimal dose of information you or your loved one receives regarding a condition. Learn to recognize when your loved one is getting overwhelmed.

Obtain the information you need.

If you need more information, get it! Ask your loved one if it's OK to call the doctor and ask some questions.

Get information from other members of the health care team.

Nurses, pharmacists, physical and occupational therapists, and the many other members of the health care team have a wealth of information. Get plugged into these resources.

Understand your intention for gathering information. There are two people in the caregiving relationship, you and your loved one. Both of you need to be supported. Be clear about who any given action supports.

Are you gathering information to help your loved one make informed medical choices? Are you becoming informed as a way of helping yourself manage your own fear.

Ask permission from your loved one before you volunteer information. You might run across what you



think is the perfect solution to a medical challenge. Ask before you share it.

Where do you Get Your Information?

A good source of information may be your healthcare provider, your pharmacist, or a library with medical information. The Internet can be a good source of medical information, but be sure to go to reputable sites that your doctor can recommend.

Hopefully the advice above will help you to communicate with your healthcare provider in order to get the best care possible. Also, to help you find a doctor that truly cares for you or your loved one. Remember, getting the right information by researching and asking questions will help you to make informed medical choices. Also keeping a strong relationship with your doctor is one of the key steps in staying healthy!

Source: www.strengthforaring.com