

New Connections

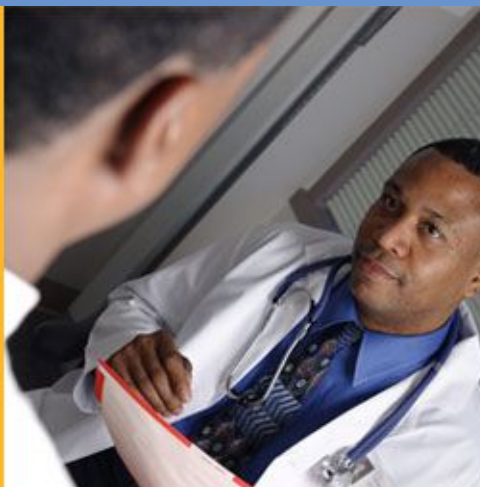
HELPING YOU CARE FOR A LOVED ONE DURING TREATMENT



Issue 19

The Doctor-Patient Relationship:

You play a part, too.



People frequently complain that the level of communication they have with their doctors is not as good as they wish it would be. You may have witnessed this in the person, you're caring for. It's possible to remedy this situation and it's important to do so. People must be able to talk to their doctors so that their needs can be met.

As a caregiver, you can help in two ways:

1. Suggest that your loved one use our tips below for holding up his or her end of the communication.
2. Attend doctor's visits with your loved one and function as another set of ears and as an advocate.

Patients should know their own style

Everyone has a different notion about what characteristics make the ideal doctor. That's why the perfect doctor for one person may not be a good match for another.

Some people want a doctor who will share information in a clinical and business-like manner. They expect their doctors to be medical experts rather than friends. Other people want their doctors to have an excellent "bedside manner." They value doctors who can address their emotional health as well as their medical needs.

People also differ on how much information they want. Many people want to know a lot of medical details about their illness and treatment because it makes them feel more in control of what is happening to them. Others want only small amounts of information because it disturbs and overwhelms them to hear too many details.

Once patients have determined their wants, they should let their doctors know. That way, doctors will know their patients' expectations and try to meet them.

It's a two-way street

A good doctor-patient relationship is a two-way street. The doctor certainly has responsibilities to the patient, but the patient has responsibilities, too. Sometimes patients forget that. By assuming these responsibilities, a patient is doing his or her part for the relationship and the communication.

Here are some things patients can do:

- During the period before a doctor's visit, patients should think carefully about what issues are most important to them, what questions they have, and what they are experiencing that may warrant attention. Writing these things down – even if they seem inconsequential or "dumb" – is very helpful. Doctors like to solve problems, but they can't solve anything if they don't know what the problem is.
- When patients ask questions during the visit, they should jot down keywords next to the question so they'll remember the doctor's answer. Then, once at home, they can write out the answers fully. That way, they'll remember what they

learned and “own” it. As a caregiver, you can help by jotting down the answers as you hear them.

- ▮ Patients who value more, rather than less, information should ask the doctor if he or she has written information or brochures available for additional reading. They should also ask about recommended Web sites.
- ▮ When patients are given instructions by the doctor, patients should write them down, too. You can help by making sure that both you and the patient understand the directions before you leave the office. If either of you don’t understand them, ask the doctor for clarification.
- ▮ Patients should follow the doctor’s instructions to the letter. If, for some reason, the patient doesn’t think he or she can comply with an instruction, the doctor should be told, right then and there. That way, the doctor can revise the instruction. Let’s say, for example, the doctor instructs the patient to take a particular medicine that the patient knows from experience makes him or her feel nauseous. Rather than going home and not taking the medicine, the patient should tell the doctor right then the problem with the medicine so that the problem can be solved.
- ▮ Patients should try to share everything they can with the doctor – not only aspects of their physical well-being, but also those of their emotional well-being. Sometimes clinical depression can accompany cancer, but it can be treated if a patient reveals what he or she is feeling.
- ▮ Patients should anticipate that they will have questions and concerns once they are back at home. That’s often the way it happens. Rather than waiting for the next doctor’s visit, patients should ask the doctor about the best time to call with questions. Some doctors have a special time to return calls.

Most doctors appreciate patients who do all of the above. They are interested in their patients’ concerns and take their questions seriously. They are also happy to give the time patients need to air their concerns.

What if the doctor doesn’t respond as you both would like?

Some doctors, just like some people, are not as patient as others and may not automatically respond to the patient’s initial efforts at good communication. If that’s the case, there are still ways to improve that situation before deciding the relationship is hopeless. (Click [here](#) for a discussion of these ways.) If, however, all of the patient’s, and your efforts, do not result in your loved one getting the care and concern he or she needs, it may be time to find a new doctor. People shouldn’t stay with a doctor just to protect his or her feelings. It is, after all, the patient’s body and the patient has the right to find the best doctor for him or her.

[Learn More](#)

[Click here to get more information on this subject from the American Cancer Society's online bookstore.](#)

**For more cancer information, call 1-800-ACS-2345
or visit www.cancer.org, anytime, day or night.**

[Contact Us](#) | [New Connections Home Page](#) | [Legal & Privacy Information](#)

This information is for informational purposes only. This information is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without consulting a qualified healthcare provider. Please consult your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your condition. Use of this online service is subject to the disclaimer and the terms and conditions.

Copyright 2008 © American Cancer Society
National Home Office, 250 Williams Street, Atlanta, Georgia 30303-1002