

BEING A PARTNER IN YOUR HEALTH CARE*

(An Outline by Roberta Milman for Dupont Circle Village)

INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW OF THE DOCUMENT

1. Your health care is a partnership between you and your physician
2. Your role
 - a. Preparation
 - b. The appointment
 - c. Follow-up
 - d. Compliance
 - e. Knowing your own mind
3. Role of others
4. Suggestions and tools for an effective partnership
5. Resources

YOUR ROLE

1. Preparing for Doctor's Appointment
 - a. What to bring
 - i. Insurance, Medicare, Medicaid card(s)
 - ii. List of medicines/supplements with doses
 - iii. List of health conditions/diseases with treatments
 - iv. List of surgeries and hospitalizations with dates and health condition
 - v. Copies of relevant scans/x-rays with reports
 - vi. Paper and pen for taking notes
 - vii. Referral/authorization forms if required
 - viii. Family medical and health history
 - b. What to prepare
 - i. List of symptoms, changes in your conditions, health or mood
 - ii. List of relevant changes in your life
 - iii. Prioritized list of questions and concerns
 - c. What to learn in advance
 - i. Become knowledgeable about your health conditions, treatments and risk factors.
 - d. Consider bringing a trusted relative/friend to listen and take notes.
2. During the Appointment
 - a. Provide
 - i. Accurate information about all insurance
 - ii. Health Care Proxy, names of authorized representative/contact person, advanced directive if required

- iii. Information about changes in condition, medication, mood, life, medication side effects
- b. Do the following
 - i. Stay on point: have a health related, not a social conversation.
 - ii. Express your concerns and ask questions about your condition, medicines, treatments and limitations on activities, etc. but prioritize.
 - iii. Get clarification of anything you do not understand.
 - iv. Take notes and/or ask the doctor to write down information and instructions.
 - v. Ask for test results and copies/reports of procedures and scans.
 - vi. If possible or if you are unsure, take time making significant decisions to consider information, research, and your own values, lifestyle, experience.
- c. Do not hesitate to
 - i. Discuss sensitive issues: incontinence, memory, sexuality, gender identity.
 - ii. Talk about cost.
 - iii. Ask about getting a second opinion.
- 3. The Appointment: Getting Information
 - a. Questions about the following if appropriate
 - i. Your condition, prevention, progression, treatment options, risks, restrictions, lifestyle impact, recommended options and rational
 - ii. Physician's experience with a procedure, surgery, treating a specific condition
 - iii. Your medication, purpose, how to take, side effect interactions with other medication and supplements, generic equivalents and cost
 - b. Things to consider
 - i. The physician may not know as much about your lifestyle and values as you do. You may need to explain them.
 - ii. Words describing recovery, outcomes, treatment process may have different meanings or expectations for you and for the physician; for example, "full recovery", "back to normal".
 - iii. Be careful of recommendations "based on your age." They may be appropriate or they may be based on an erroneous assumption about you.
 - iv. Protocols or test results may have the physician make a treatment recommendation that they or you may not agree with. You must know enough to make your own decision.

4. After the Appointment

a. Possible actions

- i. Get scans, reports, lab results sent to you and relevant other doctors.
- ii. Do research to understand your condition, reports, medications, and analyses so you can make decisions.
- iii. Talk to people with the same health conditions or who had the same procedure.
- iv. Consider your fit with your doctor or getting a second opinion.
- v. Comply with treatment regimens, taking medications and your doctor's advice.
- vi. Notify your doctor of changes in your condition, new symptoms and medical side effects.

MISCELLANEOUS SUGGESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Be a partner: get education, ask questions, keep records, comply with treatment, report changes, consider your values and lifestyle and risk tolerance in making decisions.
2. Have an advocate, especially important for serious conditions, hospitalizations, emotional situation, and dealing with insurance.
3. Consider your instincts combined with facts. You know how you feel and your own body. If you think something is not right, take action.
4. Your medical records belong to you. You should be able to read and to get them.
5. Create your own personal health/medical record and keep it updated.
6. Prepare a health care proxy and advance director and provide them to your family, physician, hospital.

RESOURCES: (See *Resources for Being a Partner in Your Health Care*)

***Disclaimer:** *The above suggestions are derived from research, authoritative websites, personal experience and suggestions from others. They are meant as suggestions and need to be taken as such. They are not medical advice and they may not pertain to every person or experience.*