

How to Get the Healthcare You Deserve

How to Get the Healthcare You Deserve: 10 Things your doctor may not have told you

Healthcare has changed significantly over the decades, but even with the advent of electronic medical records there still may be gaps in your health care. Asking questions whenever you need medical help is the best way to feel confident that you are getting the best care possible in all health interactions.

When you see your doctor, do you believe he or she has a full picture of your health and is giving you the ideal treatment for your condition? Do you see multiple healthcare providers, and do you feel confident that your health is being updated and assessed by all of them?

Alert! You are the only person in charge of your health. It truly is up to you to ask questions of your doctor, to compile your medical records and to share them with your doctors if they do not have them, and to get the healthcare you deserve regardless of fear or time constraints at a doctor appointment.

Let's see how healthcare has changed and what you may be missing, so you can become an empowered patient, a patient who feels confident when a health crisis or illness impacts your life.

1. When you receive a prescription, do you ask questions or simply fill it and refill it over and over?

There have been media reports of people receiving a prescription from their doctor and repeatedly filling that prescription over and over, simply because they have no co pay. Refills are seemingly unlimited, and are provided with a simple call and request to the doctor's office. Once a prescription is written, the patient rarely questions how long they should remain on the drug, much less question if it is really needed at all. The number one question you should ask prior accepting a prescription is 'How long should I take this medication?' Be firm and be sure you understand the answer prior to leaving the office. If

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need be, you can also call the doctor office and ask more questions before you fill or refill the prescription.

2. If you have a healthcare crisis, can you go to an emergency room without having a current insurance plan or have a copy of your insurance cards?

If you are in need of urgent care, yes, you must go to the emergency room immediately, regardless of your insurance status. Symptoms such as severe pain, significant bleeding, loss of consciousness, accident, or loss of movement in your body must be treated immediately. The crisis will be evaluated and emergency care is available. Do not delay getting emergency help, even if you do not have your insurance cards, medical records, insurance coverage or are out of your normal living area. The hospital can connect the dots for payment after the crisis has been treated.

3. Your doctor has read the report on your past testing and can answer all your questions, right?

Many times the physician is looking at the conclusion of the report and checking for the answer to the question he/she sent you to get the test. If you have a chronic condition or have had multiple tests to follow up the progression of disease, it is up to you to ask the doctor to compare your past test with your current one, and to speak to you about all the stages of your disease. Sometimes the doctor maybe just looking for a quick answer on the test report and has not had a chance to fully read and contrast reports. You may also have had a test done at a different facility and that test report may not have been added to your medical record. It is up to you to follow what testing and results say about your health condition.

4. Have you assumed all your medical records are now part of your electronic medical record (EMR), everything is good to go and it is complete?

All healthcare providers who accept insurance had many markers where they were required to have electronic medical records in place by 2015's end, or were evaluated by current rules and deemed not to need them. This being

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said, the EMR had to be in place and be able to start accepting information. This does not mean your EMR is up to date with all the information available over decades of your health and that it has all the physicians and facilities you encountered included into one medical record that at any moment your physician can pull up and see everything about you. Past health records were hand written by various healthcare providers and those records were varied in completeness and coherence. Currently, the goal of all healthcare providers is to start with the current patient and begin to use only the EMR in place. So, if you need your doctor to know something from before electronic records were used, this is a good time to remind him to add it to your records. If you see multiple providers, get a copy of your records from each provider sent to your primary care doctor to be included in your EMR. You must be an integral part in completing your own health picture.

5. If a specialist takes care of multiple parts of your body do they cross over in their care or diagnosis?

For example: if you are having trouble with your blood vessels, you may assume that your cardiologist takes care of all the blood vessels in your legs, head, chest and heart. Well, no. If you have blood vessel issues in your brain, you would see a neurologist. If you have trouble in your legs, you may see a vascular specialist. If you have trouble in your heart, you may see a cardiologist. It is funny how the blood vessels are running throughout your body and feed different organs to keep you alive, but your body is cut up and dealt with by different system specialists. The attempt to store all of your health information in one place is the reason the EMR program originated. Its' purpose is to enable all physicians and facilities to see what is going on in your body. It is an attempt to bring things together as one cohesive unit, to find discrepancies, to point out potential issues and to design a plan to keep you healthy. It is a lofty goal that has just begun as it is not fully functioning at this time.

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6. When faced with a new disease diagnosis or health crisis, do you allow the disease to become a label for you?

If you have not been feeling well and have let yourself go for an extended period of time, a trip to the doctor brings the fear of what could be wrong with you, a fear that may be very serious. Perhaps you have not been listening to the signals your body had given you and now you are in a rough spot. Once you have a diagnosis, you can start the path of doing things differently to heal your body. These things may include surgery, prescription medications or drastic medical procedures; the diagnosis may be a wake-up call to make life changing choices now before your symptoms take control of your life. Changes can always be made to allow your body to heal no matter what course of treatment you choose. The most important thing is to know in your gut what will work for you, to make the hard choices based on research and guidance, and to hope and faith you can do it.

7. Is the emergency room the best place to go if you have not been to the doctor for years and you are feeling a crisis impending?

The emergency room is specifically for crisis management. If you go to the ER, the crisis will be evaluated, you will receive a diagnosis or a potential working list of things that may be wrong with you and you will be given treatment to help calm the crisis symptoms. You will not be given a treatment plan to help you take care of yourself; rather you will be given a referral to a primary care doctor who will help you start taking care of yourself. It can be very scary if you are really ill and rush to the emergency room only to leave in much the same state you entered, with very little new information or direction. A wake-up call does not come with directions; it comes with an alarm to pay attention. Often the emergency room will tell you the result of the failure in your body but they are not equipped to help you take care of it nor how to get out of the place you are in.

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8. If you have a medical test done, is that test the only factor that matters in taking care of your health?

In some situations, you may be getting a test to gauge the effectiveness of your current treatment. In this case, the physician may not refer to older tests to compare the degree of change. Even further, you may have more than one doctor treating you, and may be sent for the same test more than once without the doctors corresponding on a course of treatment. If you have your health records in the electronic system, you still cannot be sure that your doctors' notes have been included in the record nor that each doctor involved in your care has referred to the record. Physicians have a very limited time to help you during your visit, and sitting down to read, collect and evaluate all your past results and treatment plans is not always an option. When you are at a healthcare visit, the current situation is the point of evaluation and action. It is up to you to alert each of your providers about the actions being taken by your other healthcare providers. It is also up to you to be sure they have reviewed all pertinent information. A simple 'yes, I saw it', is not the answer you are looking for. What you are looking for is 'yes, I saw what Dr. --- said the last time you saw him/her and I understand how you might be feeling today. Now let's see what we can do to help you feel better, yes?'

9. If you have seen a specialist or other medical provider several years ago and he or she recognizes you when you show up with a recurring problem, you assume he or she knows everything about your health from the past visits, right?

The states have several different yearly markers as to how long providers are required to retain your health records; it can be as little as five to as many as ten years. If you have had surgeries, implants, cancer, extensive treatments or a complicated medical condition, it is truly in your best interest to retain paper and digital records for your own health record. Since the internet is a new form of recording medical information, it is important to note that prior to the

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turn of the century, paper was the name of the game and those records will be destroyed within the next decade. If you need information, get it now.

10. If you have been going to the same physician for your entire lifetime, your physician knows everything about you, correct?

Your health is ever changing, and your doctor sees sometimes hundreds of patients per month. For your doctor to remember everything about all patients is just impossible. If you are at a healthcare visit, gently remind your doctor of your condition, touch on the treatments you have already tried and what worked and did not, then allow the appointment time to unfold with a new treatment plan to begin helping you feel better.

If you have a chronic health condition or health crisis, it is your job to learn what is happening to you, how you got into that condition and how to prevent further complications while your body heals. It can be very complicated and intimidating to know what to ask, how to be a participant in your treatment plan and how to get the healthcare you deserve. Try a patient advocate that has the time to explain what is going on, how you may have gotten into that condition and how to make the best choices going forward. Maybe even more importantly, let an advocate help discover how to prevent further disease and complications in your body. An advocate can interact with you, your spouse and your family members, whomever you need, in order to allow for full support in getting you healthier through faith and hope for a good outcome. An advocate can also help you see what information is important to keep in designing your medical health file going forward.

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Dr. Jeanette Gallagher, ND is a Naturopath who has been in healthcare for more than 43 years in various positions and education.

Dr. Jeanette helps people who are not well or feel that something is not right, showing them how to be a participant in their healthcare and disease process. The goal is to minimize complications from incomplete records or communication, decrease stress or fear in making hard choices, improve health and quality of life by better personal choices.

She shows you how to support your healthcare provider by providing information consistently and completely about your health so there are less questions or gaps in your care.

She is a former dental hygienist, current patient advocate and mother of four grown children. Over the decades she has encountered many personal and health crises' in her life to learn what works and what does not. Dr. Jeanette is also a super caregiver and can share what it takes to help others.

For a listing of her services visit: www.MyPersonalAdvocate2.com