



Health Awareness

Talk To Your Doctor: Getting It Right

(NAPSA)—People may spend hours preparing for a date but fail to prepare for a far more important meeting—with their doctor.

It's not a good idea to leave a doctor's appointment without a clear idea of what just happened. It can be downright dangerous if you and your doctor don't understand each other or you forget to mention a symptom or a drug you're taking.

"It's your health, after all," says Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, America's largest health care foundation. "It's your doctor's responsibility, but it's yours, too, to see that you get the best medical advice."

Preparing for a visit to the doctor's office is actually just a small part of the big picture, which is about making all Americans healthier by getting them to eat better, exercise and take charge of their own health.

Those with chronic diseases must start sticking to treatment plans.

Unprepared Patients, Impatient Doctors

"Most patients go to doctors woefully unprepared," says Dr. James Bailey, a professor of medicine at the University of Tennessee-Memphis. "But doctors are at fault, too. They need to educate patients and get away from the traditional roles of the doctor pronouncing and the patient obeying."

Half or more people with heart conditions, for instance, don't fol-



Photo: Roger Tully/Used with permission from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Patients may want to talk to their doctor about setting goals for healthy eating and exercise.

low their prescribed treatment, says Dr. Bailey, who is also a member of the Healthy Memphis Common Table, which operates one of 15 community-based projects the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation sponsors around the country to help fix the nation's broken health care system.

The program, called Aligning Forces for Quality, emphasizes what people can do to improve the quality of their health care, such as making informed choices and becoming partners with their doctors in managing their health.

The Memphis program devised a checklist that encourages patients to talk to their doctors about setting goals for healthy eating and exercise and then to stick to them. Doctors use another part of the list to check off regular tests for monitoring chronic diseases.

Lean On Your Family If You Have To

- Get family involved. You may even want a friend or family member to accompany you on doctor visits to help you remember to ask the right questions and understand the answers.

- Learn everything about the drugs you're taking. Read the information that comes with your prescription. Bring a list of your medications and doses to the appointment.

- Prepare for your appointment. Make a list of questions you want to ask. Don't be afraid or embarrassed or neglect to ask: "How is this treatment going to help me? Is there a downside?"

- Take notes as the doctor answers your questions. If you feel you can't talk and take notes, bring a friend, spouse or relative.

- If you're not sure you understand, repeat what the doctor says and ask him or her to confirm that you have understood correctly. If the doctor uses medical terms you don't understand, ask him or her to use plainer language. Don't hesitate to ask for written instructions.

- Finally, when possible, choose clinics and hospitals based on information about the quality of their care.

- Understand behaviors that can put you or family members at risk and understand how to manage illnesses.

For More Information

Visit www.rwjf.org/goto/checklist to download a checklist that highlights tips and questions to help you prepare for your next medical visit.