

Health NEWS YOU CAN USE

Making The Most Of Your First Visit To A New Primary Care Doctor

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(NAPSA)—Patient preparation is critical when visiting a new doctor. Whether you are seeing this doctor for an illness or for a checkup, you must be well prepared, because this doctor doesn't know you.

You wouldn't go to an accountant or a lawyer without lining up the facts and figures. Don't go to a new doctor without similar preparation.

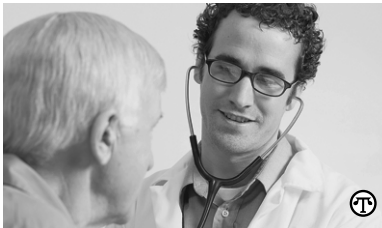


Dr. Varner

If you are young and healthy, your preparation is just trying to remember what time the appointment is.

If you have had several major health problems and have had operations, your preparation for your first visit with a new primary care doctor may take some time and effort.

If you have a specific complaint, practice telling the whole story in the shortest amount of time. Don't leave out important things, but a quick, concise history of your problem will be invaluable to the doctor. This will leave time for more precise discussion.



Obtaining a good history of the patient's problem is a critical aspect of a new patient visit.

If you are worried about forgetting something, write everything down the day before and bring your notes with you. From a physician's perspective, obtaining a good history of the patient's problem is the most important aspect of a new patient visit. It is more important than the physical exam, laboratory tests or X-rays.

Know your medicines. You don't have to be able to pronounce them or spell them. We can't, either. Bring a list of your medications—not just a bag of the containers. Make sure you have written the dosages. This will help the physician and his nursing staff in organizing your chart.

If you have had any prior operations or major procedures, be prepared to give the reasons for

and the outcomes of the procedure. If you have major health issues that require serious discussion, make sure a relative or close friend is in the room with you for that discussion. This will help you remember major components of managing your health.

Did you know you can walk into the medical records department of the hospital and just ask for a copy of the discharge summary or any other document and they will give you a copy? If you had many days of admission, the discharge summary is a good document to have and to share with your new doctor. If you had outpatient work, ask for the procedure note or the operative note.

All of this may seem like a lot to do, but anything less is trivializing your own health-care. You can't afford to do that.

Dr. Varner is a general surgeon who became Aflac's medical consultant in 2001. He was in the practice of surgery for almost two decades before a horseback riding accident in September 2000 that left him a quadriplegic. His writing reflects perspective from the patient's and physician's sides of modern medicine.