

Health Notes

The Doctor/ Patient Dialogue

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It has long been considered that 80% of a diagnosis comes from the doctor/patient discussion. The information a doctor can acquire during this interchange is invaluable. Using clues obtained, a doctor can efficiently determine if or what test and types of treatments would be appropriate. Unfortunately, there are doctors who, for variety of reasons, are minimizing the doctor/patient dialogue. Many are fearful of lawsuits, so they order every test imaginable. Others do not want to fall behind in their schedule, so they order tests to save valuable office time. Sadly, a small percentage just don't want to take the time.

During your initial office visit for a particular problem, there are important topics that your doctor needs to discuss with you. First, have you had the symptoms before? Previous episodes of certain conditions can result in longer recovery from a current episode. The success or failure of previous care may help your doctor in determining an effective treatment. It is possible that diagnostic test already performed could be utilized to treat a current episode.

When and how your symptoms started is important. Whether the onset was sudden, traumatic or gradual is important to your doctor. The duration of your symptoms prior to seeking care is equally important. Long-standing problems, which are chronic, often take longer to help. Acute symptoms, less than two months in duration, usually are what most doctors treat.


Your doctor should ask you what your symptoms feel like. You should describe these as sharp, dull ache, burning, stabbing, shooting, tingling, or numb. The nature of your symptoms is an important factor. Be prepared to identify the location of your pain to your doctor. Where the pain is can be the actual site of your problem or it can be referred from a different point of origin.

How your condition affects your activities of daily living is of great interest to your doctor. Can you sleep the night through, can you work with the pain, and do you often need

assistance to get through the day... these are some of the factors to think about.

What makes your symptoms better or worse is a key element in a decision making process for your doctor. Does changing positions alter your pain? Does what you eat affect your symptoms? Does ice or heat change your pain? Does aspirin or Tylenol help? This is the line of questioning that should take place.

Finally, that wonderful pain scale. You should be asked, "On a scale of 0-10, 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you have ever had, where would you rate your present pain level." Since everyone has different pain tolerance, this gives your doctor a reference point for you.

Next time you need to see a doctor, familiarize yourself with these points. Be prepared to share them. If your doctor doesn't ask these questions, you have the responsibility to explain them... don't hesitate! Utilizing this information correctly will help your doctor in prescribing necessary tests and treatment. You will get answers and help in record time. 

“you mean
I could've
deducted
that?”

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