

Health and Wellness:

Health Literacy

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Information is critical in the health care field. Unfortunately, disconnects oftentimes occur with unnecessary yet preventable serious implications. When visiting the doctor for yourself or a loved one, it's important to make sure that everything is understood correctly. Some doctors make more of an effort to be understood by confirming that everyone is on the same page. This is critical in light of the belief that as many as nine out of ten patients are not equipped with the skills needed to manage their health care needs and prevent disease.

Many patients are afraid or embarrassed to admit that they do not understand medical terminology or what was just communicated to them. Some people experience this pressure so strongly they give the appearance that they understand. When doctors move on to another topic before the preceding information is processed, patients are not afforded ample opportunity to formulate intelligent questions. Doctors would be well served by stopping and checking to ensure that the patient and/or caretaker comprehends what has been stated thus far. This problem is exacerbated because most people have reduced mental abilities and recollection abilities when they are scared, intimidated and/or overwhelmed.

In the absence of the doctor confirming everything was absorbed adequately, here are a few suggestions to get you on track with your physician:

1. **Learn about your health:** No one knows you better than yourself. Take time to learn more about your own health concerns to be as health literate as possible. This will help you to be better prepared when discussing the condition, possible medications and treatment plan options.
2. **Medical terminology:** Become familiar with common medical terms. Here are a few helpful internet resources to get you started: <http://dictionary.reference.com/medical>, www.medterms.com, www.mlanet.org (Medical Library Association) and everyone's best friend: Google.
3. **Walk in with a list:** It's too easy to make a list when the thought occurs rather than be forced to remember things under pressure. Write down everything you want to discuss with the doctor and make sure everything is covered before you leave. No one remembers everything so take notes as your questions are answered.
4. **Teach back:** To ensure that you understand everything, repeat back what you understand to the doctor and request an accuracy confirmation.
5. **Doctor too busy?:** Either ask for another appointment or request to see a nurse or assistant who can assist.
6. **Bring reinforcement:** Bring a caring relative or friend who will also act as another note taker. The extra set of eyes and ears will come in very helpful.
7. **More questions?:** Ask who you can call if you have any more questions after the appointment.

In summary, the more educated you are as a patient, the greater likelihood that your health and the health of your loved ones will be better.

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