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*Acupuncture  
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## HOW TO SPEAK EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Visiting a healthcare practitioner (western medical doctor, acupuncturist, chiropractor, physician's assistant, physical therapist, nurse practitioner) requires good communication skills on behalf of both patients and doctors. Patients need to be able to convey medical information in a clear and concise manner. Practitioners must be able to tell patients in plain English what is causing their symptoms and what must be done to treat the condition effectively. During the discourse, key information often does not get relayed, for a variety of reasons. What can you do to communicate more effectively with your doctor?

- 1) Treat your doctor visit as a business meeting. You have a short amount of professional time to relay much key information about your condition. Manage the time wisely.
- 2) It's your responsibility to communicate key information in an orderly fashion: such as medical background and symptomatic progression of medical events. If you have a number of health concerns to discuss, prepare in advance for the meeting with your doctor. Organize your thoughts and perhaps take notes about key symptoms so that you can convey the information as clearly and succinctly.
- 3) Keep to the symptoms and refrain from anecdotal stories. It's easy to go off on a tangent about your visit to your aunt's when you noticed the ache in your back. These stories waste precious professional time that should be spent discussing your symptoms and treating your disease. Did you really make an appointment with your doctor to talk about your vacation?
- 4) Be able to answer detailed questions clearly. Be specific and avoid vagaries when describing your symptoms. If the practitioner asks you about something you haven't paid much attention to; rather than providing a list of information unrelated to the question, just say 'I'm not sure', or 'I don't have an answer for that'. Make a mental note to observe your body between visits so you can provide more complete information on a subsequent visit.
- 5) If you have a number of symptoms that you are managing, keep a log of frequency, severity, time and duration, location and any other characteristics your practitioner typically asks about. It's often difficult to recall this information when the doctor asks, so write it down in advance and even hand your practitioner a copy.
- 6) If you are on many medications, keep a log of the drugs, dosages and times taken so that you can hand a copy to your medical practitioner. Especially in the western medical community, where you see a different specialist for separate conditions, the doctors are often not aware that a patient is on many other drugs in addition to what s/he is prescribing. This leads to over prescribing and drug interactions. It is vital that all of your healthcare practitioners are aware of your drug use and history.
- 7) Be honest. Don't lie or withhold information. Don't exaggerate or play down symptoms. Giving inaccurate information will only lead to misdiagnosis and treatment.
- 8) Don't be embarrassed to talk about your bodily functions. Remember, to your practitioner these are very routine conversations: discussing urine and bowel habits are no different than talking about a blown carburetor.
- 9) Don't interrupt your doctor's thought process during pauses or while taking notes. S/he is reviewing your case, looking for any holes in the medical history that require further illumination, and mentally arriving at diagnostic and treatment options for you. Use this time to do a self-review of your own. Have you communicated all that you came into say? Was there anything you omitted or feel you should convey differently?
- 10) When your doctor goes over diagnostic and treatment options for you, be sure you understand what is being said. In the medical community there is a tendency to speak in jargon. Don't be intimidated by words you don't understand. Ask for an explanation of terminology. You may find it helpful to bring a friend to help listen to diagnostic explanations and ask questions for you. Alternatively, take notes or record the conversation.
- 11) Don't interrupt your practitioner during explanations: often your questions will be anticipated and answered. Your practitioner may forget where s/he left off and this may prevent necessary information from being provided to you.
- 12) It is vital that you understand your treatment and care. Know what the drugs, herbs or nutritional supplements that are being prescribed are doing. Ask for a timeline so you know what to expect and when in terms of recovery and when therapy should be discontinued.
- 13) Be sure your practitioner has fully disclosed all possible risks and side-effects of treatment, and know what to be alerted for should treatment go array. This is especially important for drug therapy and recommended surgeries.
- 14) Organize your questions before your visit. Your doctor has to work within the timeframe of the clinic schedule. Don't corner your practitioner after the visit has concluded with questions you forgot to ask during your appointment. This will delay other patients who are waiting. The time will have to be made up by shortening another patient's treatment.

Your doctor visit is a professional appointment. Treat it as such. Arrive promptly and be prepared for your visit. By following these guidelines I'm sure you will get the most efficient and effective care possible from your healthcare professional.