OPEN ARMS
Patient Advocacy

Tips to Help You Build a Relationship with Your Healthcare Professional

Reference: Wen, Leana, and Joshua Kosowsky. When Doctors Don't Listen: How to Avoid Misdiagnoses and Unnecessary Tests. St Martin's Press, 2012.

"You need to speak up for yourself and be your own best advocate. If you don't speak up it could lead to inferior communication and care, if you don't think your doctor understands you, they haven't heard the whole story, you don't agree with an aspect of your care, or you don't feel your questions have been answered say so and ask for clarification. If you feel you are rushed, speak up. If you feel like you are just another patient and that what is happening to you doesn't matter, speak up. It is the doctor's job to listen, discuss, and ***treat you like a member of your healthcare team****."*

Before Your Appointment

⇒ Define Your Purpose: Determine why you are seeing your HCP (e.g., discussing test results, reporting symptoms, or requesting a referral). Keep it simple and concise.

⇒ Track Symptoms: Log new and existing symptoms. Include details like onset, severity, and progression. Photos can be useful for visible symptoms (e.g., rashes, bruising).

⇒ Prepare Questions: Write down only relevant questions, leaving space for answers.

⇒ Bring Support: A trusted person can take notes, keep you on track, and help clarify information.

⇒ Provide a Summary: Give your HCP a written copy of your symptoms and concerns.

During Your Appointment

⇒ Stay Calm: Take a deep breath before entering and manage emotions to communicate clearly.

⇒ Be Concise: Present your concerns in a structured way—when did the symptoms start, their severity, duration, and changes over time.

⇒ Avoid Self-Diagnosis: While researching online is helpful, avoid fixating on a diagnosis before speaking with your HCP.

⇒ Ensure Understanding: If the HCP seems distracted or doesn't understand, calmly repeat your concerns.

⇒ Be Assertive: If interrupted, politely ask to finish your thoughts. A good HCP will actively listen and respect your input.

⇒ Ask Questions: Ensure you understand your diagnosis, treatment, and next steps before leaving.

⇒ Respect Differences: If you disagree with your HCP, discuss your concerns openly and listen to their perspective.

⇒ Engage in Your Care: Be a partner in your own care. Ask the HCP what their thoughts are and about the reasoning behind tests, diagnoses, and treatments. This fosters collaboration and ensures informed decisions.

⇒ Advocate for Yourself: If you feel rushed or unheard, speak up. Effective communication leads to better care.

Meeting a New HCP

⇒ Start Fresh: Provide a copy of your medical concerns and avoid dwelling on past negative experiences.

⇒ Stay Professional: Do not criticize former doctors, as it may create a negative impression.

⇒ Remain Focused: The appointment is for medical concerns, not socializing.

⇒ Assess Effectiveness: Even if you don't personally like the HCP, determine whether they provide the necessary care. If you don't feel comfortable with them it is okay to find a new HCP but remember you may not find one right away.

After Your Appointment

⇒ Review Notes: Ensure your concerns were addressed and you understand the next steps.

⇒ Follow Up if Needed: If questions remain unanswered or symptoms persist, schedule another appointment.

⇒ By preparing ahead and effectively communicating, you can establish a productive partnership with your HCP and ensure the best possible care.