

PLANNING TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

by Richard Smith, Editor

A visit to the doctor isn't what it used to be! Of course, maybe we used to be too trusting and willing to put our health and well-being in some else's hands anyway?

But, as the times have changed, it has become necessary for us to make many changes in our behavior as consumers as well. It is very important that we now realize that a trip to the doctor requires us to prepare in advance and be involved in the processes of diagnosis and treatment.....really not much different than a trip to the auto repair shop! And who would even think of going to a car repair shop and saying, "Go ahead and do anything you want and then just give me the bill."

Before we go to the doctor, we need to prepare by writing down a detailed description of the problem—

- When it first started
- What was noticed
- How the symptoms have changed
- Are there other problems that may seem unrelated?
- What changes have occurred in our life? —Foods? Medications? Stress? Exercise? Sleep?
- Any self-treatments we may have already tried
- If we've experienced the same or a similar problem before? When? What finally happened that time?

Our responsibilities as effective consumers of health services have just begun when we make this list!

When we see the doctor, we need to start by telling them all of the things we have on our list. [If you give them your list, make sure that you talk with them about it too so that you are sure they understand the history of the problem.]

A good idea also is to take a note pad along and then write down the information we receive so that we can remember exactly what was said:

- The doctor's diagnosis
- The probable cause that is described (ask if this information isn't offered!)
- The doctor's recommendations for treatment

When medications, tests, or treatments are suggested by the doctor, ask these questions and write down the answers:



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- **What is the name?**
- **Why is it needed?**
- **What are the costs and risks?**
- **Are there alternatives?**
- **What if I do nothing?**
- **Does any medication prescribed interact with other medications that we may already be using?**
- **What to do to prepare for the test or treatment?**
- **Is there anything we can do ourselves at home?**
- **What are danger signs to watch out for?**
- **How and when will I get the test results? And then what?**

It is important to remember that doctors work for us! They are there to help, but it is our responsibility to make sure that they clearly understand our problems and concerns and that the treatments we receive are what we want.

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