How To Advocate For Yourself Or A Loved One At The Doctor's Office

Advocating for yourself or a loved one at the doctor's office is an important talent. Often doctors have scheduled you for a 15 or 30 minute appointment and have people waiting so you need to be prepared. Still, you need to understand the doctor's suggestions and directions and the doctor needs to be aware of your concerns.

1. Take responsibility for your own health. You know what a healthy lifestyle looks like and try your best to live one.

2. Develop a strong doctor-patient relationship. Be honest even though it may be uncomfortable.

3. Most of all be prepared. Make a list of your concerns and questions before you go to the doctor's office. This way, you won't forget your concerns and a list also directs your office visit. If you don't understand, ask questions. Your doctor does appreciate your interest in your own health care.

4. Always bring a current list of all your medications including over the counter and "natural medicines". When your doctor starts to write a prescription, make sure you know exactly what it is for, side effects, are there other ways to handle your problem, and make sure your pharmacist or doctor is aware of all medications you take. Do the same with any tests the doctor suggests. Ask why tests are ordered, costs of the tests, and what the tests are to show.

5. Be knowledgeable about your health conditions. Web MD is a good internet source for information. Also if you have a health condition, you can go to the condition's Website for information. Do be cautious of "Cures".

6. Look into your health insurance and know what it does and does not cover.

7. Don't be a passive player in your health. Take an active role. You may not be able to afford some of the tests or medications. Are there other options? If your doctor is demeaning and not willing to listen to you, it may be time for a new doctor. Remember, you need to listen to your doctor also and if you don't understand, ask questions.

-Anita Wallinger, RN FCN