

Cancer Education

How do I advocate for myself when seeing my doctor?

“Research demonstrates that patients who are more involved in the decision-making process related to their treatment plan and overall care are more likely to achieve better health outcomes.”
(fullscript.com)

Going to the doctor can be nerve-racking, but particularly so if you are worried that you might have cancer or are there to discuss a cancer treatment plan.

So it is important that you feel you are getting all the support and knowledge you need from your appointment.

This is where self-advocacy comes in - the ability to communicate your needs. Here are some helpful tips:

1. Find a doctor you can trust:

It is important that your doctor enables you to feel safe, comfortable and understood. If you are in a position to choose, ask for recommendations from family, friends or other healthcare professionals.

Consider the following:

- Does the healthcare provider speak your language or will an interpreter be available?
- Is the gender of the healthcare provider important to you?
- If you have health insurance, is the doctor covered by your scheme?

2. Come prepared

Before your appointment, write down any symptoms you have been experiencing, how long they have been going on for and whether anything makes them worse or helps to alleviate them.

Bring with you any important information connected to your health, such as:

- Medication or supplements you have been taking.
- Your medical history e.g. illnesses and surgeries.
- Family medical history e.g. conditions or illnesses.
- Health habits e.g. smoking, drinking and frequency of exercise
- Test results from other medical providers.

If you have written everything down beforehand, this will save “thinking time” during the appointment and ensure that you won’t forget to mention anything.

3. Educate yourself

Having a good understanding of your symptoms or illness can help you be a better self-advocate and more engaged in any treatment plan.

For information on cancer, visit the “Get Educated” section of this website.

4. Ask questions

Ask your doctor any questions you have about your symptoms, health concerns, test results or treatment plan. It is a good idea to write down these questions first, so you don’t forget them. If you are too anxious to say them out loud during the appointment, you can then show them to your doctor.

5. Take notes

Bring a pen and paper or a smartphone to record any information which you can look at again later.

6. Ask for an interpreter

If you are not confident speaking or understanding English, ask before the appointment if an interpreter will be available or bring a trusted relative or friend with you, who is able to interpret.

7. Speak up

If you have any concerns or anxieties about your symptoms or a treatment plan, now is the time to voice them. This will give the doctor the chance to explain the plan more clearly and for you both to come to an agreement.

8. Take support with you

It is a good idea to bring a trusted family member, friend or caregiver with you to give you support when you are receiving news from a doctor. They can also take notes, ask questions on your behalf and interpret if necessary.

9. Explain your needs

If you have cultural or religious needs which you think are important for the doctor to know, it is important that you share them. These might be connected to dietary requirements, clothing laws or the wish to have a female in the room when you are seeing a male doctor.

10. If you forget to ask something...

If you forget to ask something, you can always contact the doctor after the appointment. Be aware that they may not respond immediately. Even so, ask the doctor the best way of getting in touch with them directly.

(Some of this information was sourced from www.fullscript.com)