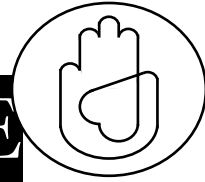


ELDERCARE UPDATE



Partnership for Eldercare: Partnering with Con Ed to help with the needs of your aging loved ones.
Spring 2007

Bridging the Communication Gap between Your Older Relative and the Doctor

Older People's Attitudes Towards Doctors:

You love your parents and want the best possible care for them. Sometimes, however, their attitude toward physicians may surprise many of us.

Sometimes older patients may be:

- Less likely to ask questions and less likely to participate in medical decision making.
- Less likely to actively seek health information, such as the purpose of a test or the reason for taking a new medication.
- Less likely to want to know details or ask questions because they view it as bothersome or insulting.
- More fearful of technological advances made in medical care.

Doctors' Attitudes Towards Older Patients:

Sometimes medical professionals' attitudes towards older patients play a role in this communication gap.

- Many are uncomfortable counseling patients, feeling that they ignore their advice on matters such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and losing weight.
- When communicating, doctors may use medical terminology that is difficult to understand.
- Communication takes time and sometimes doctors may not have as much time as patients may need.
- Sometimes health professionals may share some of the same preconceived notions found across society, expecting the older person to be frail, confused, depressed, overly talkative, needy or quarrelsome. Without specific training in working with older people, health professionals may be unaware of the needs of older patients.

Tips on Bridging the Communication Gap:

You can intervene to create a partnership whereby the doctor, family and patient share information to achieve the best possible care.

- Make sure that you have their consent to speak to the doctor.
- Assign one family member as the point person to communicate with the doctor.
- Call before an appointment to alert the doctor to any significant changes.
- Bring a list of current medications, dosages and history.
- Prepare a list of questions for your parent to ask, once an illness is diagnosed: What are the care options and alternatives – with/without treatment? What costs can we expect – out of pocket or covered by insurance? What medications are being prescribed and what are their benefits, side effects? Is a generic drug available? What foods, other medicines or activities should I avoid while taking it? Do you have written information for me to review? If I have questions, what is the best way to contact you?
- It is important to share lifestyle issues with the doctor such as drinking alcohol, smoking, not sleeping well, recent losses of friends or relatives and other life changes.

It may not be such an easy journey, because your parent may take steps like discontinuing a medication without your knowing it, but even if you don't have your parents' permission to speak to the doctor, you can contact the doctor and volunteer relevant medical information. You may face a different challenge if the doctor resists family input. Remember that you are the consumer and always have the option to find a more elder-friendly physician.

**PARTNERSHIP FOR ELDERCARE provides consultation services, referrals to community resources and lends support to the concerned caregiver. CALL US:
212-442-3113 or 1-800-94-ELDER**