



'Healthcare is a two-way street'

By Richard B. Terry, M.D. | June 12, 2017

As physicians, we want our patients to be full and active partners in their own healthcare. We have the medical training and experience, and commit to being accessible, responsive, and collaborative.

They should commit to being engaged and willing to work at improving their own health.

First and foremost, patients need to be interested in their healthcare. We encourage them to ask questions about treatment plans, or about the benefits and risks of prescription drugs. We want them to express what "health" and "illness" mean to them, in their situation. What are their goals? What can they reasonably control and what can they not?

In fact, we would love it if every one of our patients would create a list of their health priorities we could use as a roadmap to guide their care. They should review this list with their families, partners, or caregivers. My hope is this exercise would help them understand and articulate why they are seeking help, allowing us to provide them better care. Not all things can be done at once, so it is important for us to hear from patients what matters most to them right now in terms of their healthcare.

We try to help our patients understand that they should prepare for their scheduled health visits: Pull together their current health information and any changes in status, come prepared with specific questions, be ready to tell us what they understand and what they don't. Today's healthcare system is complex and can feel overwhelming, but patients should always be empowered to advocate for themselves.

Beyond the office visit, we try to inspire healthy everyday behaviors. We stress the importance of taking their medications when and how they are advised. And we make clear how important it is to come back for timely follow-up appointments.

Furthermore, we try to communicate that part of the patient's job is to invest their resources of time, money, and energy in becoming healthier: Eat healthy foods, try to stop smoking, control drinking, exercise daily, and find strength within their inner selves. We try to be understanding (but firm) in sending this message – you catch more flies with honey!

At the end of the day, it's about balance: What can be done, what is done, what you can tolerate. But healthcare is a two-way street – in order to get, you have to give.

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