

Message from the Parish Nurses

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BE YOUR OWN HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

Have you ever left your doctor's office, and wondered what he or she was talking about, or wished you had asked more question? Good communication between doctors and their patients is essential to your health, and yet too many patients feel uncomfortable "bothering" the doctor with their questions or fears. You go to the doctor for information and choices, and it's important that you receive and understand all the facts so you can make an informed decision regarding your health. By being involved in your own health advocacy, you not only gain a greater sense of control, but also an increased confidence over your decisions, greater medical understanding, and even better health outcomes.

PLAN AHEAD AND BE PREPARED

Know ahead of time what you intend to discuss with your doctor, whether it's a specific problem or your annual physical exam. The anxiety and confusion of a doctor's office can make you forget some of the things you wanted to discuss with your doctor.

- Carry a written list of questions, and bring a list of symptoms if you're not feeling well.
- Bring a list of all the medications you use – jot down the doses and how often you use them – include over the counter drugs, vitamins, minerals, and herbal supplements.
- It's helpful to the doctor to know what you've tried and how well medications and any alternative medicine has helped to relieve symptoms.
- Have your insurance card and any medical records if you are seeing the doctor for the first time. Take copies of your advance directives or ask the doctor's office for the forms so that you can prepare one.

SPEAK UP - ASK QUESTIONS

Don't be put off by big words and don't withhold information.

- Give your doctor accurate information, even the personal things and any major stressors in your life. The more honest you are, the better your doctor can help you.
- If you don't understand – ASK. Medical jargon is confusing, so ask for an explanation in plain language,

- drawing a picture or doing whatever it takes! Don't leave the doctor's office without understanding everything you have been told, and don't agree to treatments or tests that haven't been explained to you.
- Don't hesitate to tell the doctor if you have concerns about a particular treatment or change in your daily life.
- Ask about different treatment options.
- If you feel rushed or worried about decisions, share those feelings with the doctor: "I don't feel comfortable making a decision until I understand this better... I need more time..."

LISTEN AND TAKE NOTES

When your doctor is explaining something, try repeating it back to him to make sure you understand, and take notes while you are there.

- Bring notepad and pen with you, make notes about terms that you want to research. Knowing some related medical terms and common treatments will make it easier to follow instructions (e.g., taking medications correctly) and participate in planning your care.
- You may want to bring a friend or family member along to help you ask questions and take notes. This person can also help you understand explanations and remember details later.
- Ask your doctor to write down instructions for you.
- Ask your doctor for printed material about your condition.

The things that will make you an active advocate for your own health care are simple, but not easy for everyone to do. The doctor's role as an authority figure is still deeply ingrained in our culture. You may have to be assertive and really take charge of your own health care to get the results you want, but the effort is worth it. You may even have to search for a different doctor, one who gives you time and information you need to truly understand your own health status. A good way to find a doctor that is a good fit for you is to ask friends and relatives about health care providers with whom they are happy.

Don't be afraid to tell your doctor and nurses what you would like so you can all work together toward one goal:
Better Health!

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For more information go to:

www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/talking-your-doctor

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org for "**Tips: Evaluating Health Information Online**" Click on Parish Health Newsletter

Tips: EVALUATING HEALTH INFORMATION ONLINE

Many people search online to find information about medical problems and health issues. However, not all health information on the web is of equal quality. How do you find websites that are accurate and reliable? The following questions may be useful to consider when you look at a health-related website.

- Who is responsible for the content? Is it a government agency (.gov), national nonprofit organization, or professional association? An individual? A commercial organization?
- If you are reading an article or blog, what are the author's credentials? Is the author affiliated with any major medical institution?
- Who reviews the material? Is there a medical or scientific advisory board that reads the medical content before it is made available to the public?
- Are sources cited for the statistical information? For example, it's easy enough to say "4 out of 5 doctors agree..." but where did that statistic come from?
- Is the purpose and goal of the sponsoring organization clearly stated?
- Is there a way to contact the sponsor for more information or to verify information presented?
- Is the site supported by public funds or donations? If it includes advertisements, are they separate from content?
- Because health information gets outdated so quickly, does the website post the source and date for the information?
- If you have to register, is it clear how your personal information will be used? Does the site have a clear privacy policy?
- Is the website trying to sell you something?

Don't forget to talk with your doctor about what you've learned online.

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For more information go to:

www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/talking-your-doctor/opening-thoughts-why-does-it-matter

Topics discussed are:

Opening Thoughts: Why Does It Matter?

Getting Started: Choosing a Doctor You Can Talk To

How Should I Prepare? Getting Ready for an Appointment

What Can I Say? Giving Information

What Can I Ask? Getting Information

How Can I Be Involved? Making Decisions with Your Doctor

Asking More Questions: Talking To Doctors in Special Situations

Changing the Subject: Practical Matters

Can I Really Talk About That? Discussing Sensitive Subjects

Who Else Will Help? Involving Your Family and Friends

Additional Resources: For More Information

For Your Convenience: Worksheets