

# STREAMLINING YOUR OFFICE VISIT

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I'll bet everyone reading this article can remember visiting a local doctor, for an in-and-out visit, very quick and very simple. Maybe you have watched a medical show on television where the family doctor made a correct diagnosis every time without fuss or muss. Well, those things are no longer a reality. Sometimes a doctor's office visit is very complex for a number of reasons.

Over the years, more diseases have been identified, therefore making diagnosis and treatment more complex and varied, with many options. Medical health insurance forms and claims need to be detailed and filled out properly, and privacy issues have become a very important component of the medical visit.

As physicians, we try to establish a friendly environment so that we can better communicate with our patients. However, there are many rules and regulations we must follow and there are things that the patient can do to improve that line of communication as well. Working together, we can make sure that visits are sufficient and rewarding and lead to the resolution of the problem.

While you are on the phone making your appointment, see if there is a map available so that you can get to the doctor's location easily without being confused. You may even want to pre-drive the route prior to your visit. Call and reconfirm your appointment 24 hours in advance if the doctor's office doesn't do so. You can even call and see if the doctor is running late so that you might save yourself a little time and frustration.

At the front desk there is usually quite a bit of paperwork to do. Check and see if your doctor has a website. You may be able to download and complete all the paperwork at home. If you belong to a managed care organization, make sure you have prior authorization from your primary care doctor. Be sure to have a photo ID because fraud doesn't just occur at the bank. There are people that use other people's medical cards to gain access to care.

A good tool for an office visit is a pre-printed medical and surgical history, including your medications. This is very handy in an emergency situation if you have to go to the Emergency Room or call for an ambulance. If a non-parent is bringing in a pediatric or under-age patient, make sure you have notarized authorization that you are able to provide care for the patient. And don't forget the little details such as co-pays and deductibles associated with insurance claims at office visit times. Be sure to bring a credit card or checkbook for those issues.

In the exam room there is a lot of information to review. Spend some time before your appointment thinking about your problems and concerns and develop a clear description. Try to not be vague. Jot down some notes and questions in advance. If you have multiple complaints, try to prioritize them and place them in list form. Be specific. Let the doctor know how the illness affects you. Avoid vague phrases such as "I am getting worse". If possible, bring a second person

to the appointment. Typically, that would be a close family member or friend. This person will be your advocate and will help you remember things that you may forget. You remember the old saying that two heads are better than one.

Ask the doctor if he has any material such as brochures or a site on-line where you can get more information about your problem. This will help in establishing realistic goals for both you and the doctor. Time is precious for all of us, so you want to get the most out of it.

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