

Always Remember:

- **Know your doctors.**
- **Participate in your care.**
- **Value your instinct – If something seems wrong take action. It's O.K. to challenge your health care provider.**

You are the best advocate for your own health care.

Taking care of Yourself

(and your family)

How to Become a Better-informed Health Care Consumer

When You Need Health Care

A consumer service of:

*CPR,
Connecticut Patients' Rights*

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How well do you know your doctor?

- **Has a friend or family member recommended your doctor?**

While recommendations are useful, you should choose a doctor based on your own assessments and judgement.

- **Can you talk with your doctor? Does your doctor listen?**

Communication between doctor and patient is critical to appropriate care.

- **Where did your doctor train?**

Because of questions about their capability, some states and hospitals deny jobs and privileges to doctors who train at certain overseas medical institutions.

- **Is your doctor “Board Certified”?**

Board certification indicates that other physicians with similar specialties have reviewed the doctor’s education and experience.

- **What if your surgeon proposes surgery? Get a second opinion.**

If surgery is indicated, ask how often this particular surgeon performs the recommended procedure. How many of these procedures has this surgeon performed? What have been the outcomes? Has the surgeon fully explained the procedure and any risk involved? Who will be present during the procedure? Will the surgeon actually perform the procedure, or will surgical residents or students be involved?

- **When your doctor diagnoses an illness or condition, do your homework.**

Ask your doctor for written information. Look for information from other sources.

Seek a second opinion. Ask your doctor to refer you to a healthcare professional with expertise in that condition or illness. Continue to ask questions until you understand your condition and are confident in your doctor’s recommendations for treatment.

Be a participant when you see your doctor.

- **Schedule your exam, test or other procedure early in the day.**

Medical personnel are more likely to be on time and more alert.

- **Before your appointment, write down your complaints and symptoms so your doctor will have all the information possible about your condition.**

- **If the doctor makes a diagnosis, make sure you understand it.**

- **If the doctor orders tests, ask what they are for and if you need to follow any instructions or take any precautions before the tests.**

- **Make sure you understand your treatment.**

Get instructions verbally and in writing. Ask to see your medical records and ask for copies of doctor’s notes.

Be a participant when your doctor orders prescription medication.

- **Keep track of your own medical history and the drugs you take and have taken.**

Make sure your doctor knows all the prescription drugs, vitamins and supplements, and other substances you are taking. Drug interactions can cause serious damage and death.

- **Ask if there are any contraindications for prescribed medications.**

- **Listen to what is being prescribed, confirm the dosage, and make sure that is what you are given at your pharmacy.**

- **Find out what side effects you may experience.**

- **Ask if there are alternative medications.**
- **Follow your doctor’s instructions and take the medication as ordered.**

If you need to stay in the hospital:

- **Choose a hospital known for quality rather than for its location.**
- **Know when to schedule your hospitalization. If possible avoid July and August.**

- **If hospitalized, have an advocate present several times each day who understands your illness and what treatment you should be getting.**
This person should be capable of strongly expressing your needs and problems to medical staff and insisting on their response in the event that you are unable to do that yourself.

- **Wash your own hands carefully and often.**

The hospital environment presents a high risk for serious infection unrelated to your surgery or medical treatment.

- **Remind doctors and nurses about washing their hands before working with you.**

- **Insist that you are part of the health care “team.”**

- **Discuss your safety concerns.**

- **Follow your treatment instructions.**

- **Promptly let nurses know if you have any problems.**

Alert the staff if you have unusual pain, changes in your ability to move, problems with catheters, drainage tubes, wound dressings, etc., breathing difficulties, sudden symptoms after taking medication, etc.

- **Ask your advocate to monitor your hospital experience.**