

## **What Doctors Wish Their Patients Knew**

The March 2011 issue of *Consumer Report* includes an interesting article titled, "What Doctors Wish Their Patients Knew." *CR* surveyed their 49,000+ subscribers and 600 primary-care physicians. Here's my "take aways."

1. Form a long-term relationship with a primary-care physician in order to obtain better medical care. Patients who skip around tend to have more health problems and spend more on health care.
2. Respect your doctor, and find one who respects you. Patients measure respect by how well a doctor listens with patience and understanding, and spends time with them. Doctors like feedback such as questions, compliance with advice, and the occasional expression of appreciation.
3. Comply with treatment recommendations, and then provide your doctor with feedback. Noncompliance is doctors' biggest complaint about patients. Patients, on the other hand, complained about treatment plans that were too complicated, difficult to understand, too costly, or produced serious side effects.
4. Doctors are harder on themselves than we think when they can't help you feel and function better, so give them the information they need to help you. Look for a doctor who helps you better understand your condition, recognizes symptoms that need immediate attention, and works with you to minimize pain, discomfort and disability.
5. Keep an informal record of your health and treatment, and take it with you to appointments. Who you saw, when, for what reasons, tests and procedures performed, drugs prescribed including dosage and your compliance, changes in condition, etc. Take a friend or relative to the doctor with you.
6. Almost all doctors find online research by patients to be of little or no help. Be savvy about online research. Don't just "google" your condition or symptoms. Rather, go to a general, reliable site and then search for information. The article suggests the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Medline Plus, National Cancer Institute, the Mayo Clinic, and the Cleveland Clinic. Avoid sites paid for by drug and device manufacturers.
7. Don't settle for hasty care, but help your busy doctor give you the care you need. Before appointments jot down questions and concerns and put them in priority order. Ask if you can e-mail questions that weren't covered or other follow up information.
8. Know what your health plan covers. This includes drugs it will cover for a lower co-pay, deductibles it charges, and rules for using specialists, for example. Doctors reported that compliance with health-plan rules and restrictions

significantly interfere with care. Apparently when patients know their plans, they can help their physicians devise treatment plans that work and also comply with the rules.

9. Learn about malpractice claims and disciplinary actions against your doctor, generally available from your state health department. If you're concerned, bring it up. Likewise, if you're concerned that your doctor is too quick to prescribe name brand drugs, or to disparage non-traditional or non-drug treatment options, bring it up. Ask what and why.