1a

Special topic: Becoming a Patient: A Major Decision
Becoming a Patient: A Major Decision

OUTLINE

- Selecting a Primary Care Physician
- Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with your Doctor
- Finding a Specialist and Getting a Second Opinion
- Appointing a Health Care Agent
- Selecting a Hospital and Staying Safe
- Researching Health Conditions on Your Own

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Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- Finding a primary care provider to work with to maintain and improve your health is a critical step.
  - Two types of physicians: doctors of medicine (MDs) and doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs).
    - Education and training are nearly identical.
    - Both follow four years of premedical education at a college or university, then four years of medical school to earn either an MD or a DO degree.
Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- DOs receive training in manual therapy for the treatment of musculoskeletal pain and disability
- After medical school, both spend several years training at a hospital or clinic
- Some physicians wish to focus in a specific area of medicine, they seek certification from independent specialty boards
- States license physicians, and requirements vary from state to state
Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- A primary care physician is often the gateway to more specialized services, should a referral to a medical specialist be needed.

- Clearly, your doctor will be an important person in your life, so think carefully about what you want in a primary care physician.
Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- A primary care physician:
  - Treats common medical conditions and advises patients on broad aspects of health care, including preventive care
  - Provides care in non-emergency situations

- Patients requiring urgent medical attention typically visit an urgent care facility or an Emergency Room (ER)
  - Visits to the ER are appropriate for severe illnesses or injuries but not for routine examinations
Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- There are 353,000 primary care physicians in the United States, (from individuals in private practice to teams working in large health centers)
  - Large health centers are “one-stop shopping”
    - Provide most basic medical services, blood drawing, x-ray exams, and pharmacy
    - Patients may not always see the same primary care physician
Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- Private practice
  - See the same physician
  - More rewarding and long-term relationship
  - May visit several physical locations
  - Cope with different billing arrangements
  - Take greater personal responsibility for following through with recommended tests
Figure 1a.1 *Distribution of ambulatory care visits by setting in the United States.*

**Ambulatory Medical Care Utilization Estimates for 2007**

- Primary care physicians: 48.1%
- Medical specialists: 18.4%
- Surgical specialists: 16.4%
- Outpatient departments: 7.4%
- Emergency departments: 9.7%
Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- Keys to finding a primary care physician:
  - Obtain a list of providers from your insurance organization
  - Know the absolute minimum requirements
  - Consider features related to style of care
    - Ask for a list of providers early in the process to ensure that your insurance company will not contest future medical bills
Selecting a Primary Care Physician

- Your primary care physician should:
  - Have excellent record keeping
  - Have a patient-oriented approach, and strength of character
  - Be conveniently located
  - Provide appointments in a reasonable amount of time
  - Consider the physician’s style of care
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- A doctor’s appointment is a short (less than 20 min.) yet important interaction
  - Know ahead of time the duration of face-to-face time with the doctor
  - Before the visit, take time to prepare a list of medical questions and concerns
    - Simple checklists are available
Figure 1a.2 Completing a checklist.

**Checklist to Take to Your Next Doctor’s Appointment**

Print out this form and complete it to take with you when you see your doctor. This will help you give your doctor complete information and make the most of your visit.

**Reasons for This Appointment**
Why did you make this appointment? What do you want to talk about with your doctor?

**Symptoms**
Describe your symptoms, including where they are located and how they feel.

- When did your symptoms start? How long do they last? Is it constant or just sometimes?
- Have there been any recent changes in your routine? (For example, sleeping, eating, death of a loved one, divorce.)
- What treatments have you already tried, if any, and have they helped?

**Medications**
List all the medications you take. Write down all your prescriptions and any other medicines or supplements you take. You should include any medicines you stopped taking and why you stopped them. Include: the name of the drug, why you take it, the dosage, and the last time you took it.

**Notes from This Appointment**
Write down any instructions your doctor gives you, any new prescriptions, or any tests your doctor wants you to have.
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- Prioritize the list to make sure that the most serious two or three concerns are addressed
  - Make a list of concerns
  - Bring a list (or the actual containers) of any medications (prescribed and over-the-counter) and the doses that you are currently taking
  - Include vitamins and supplements
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- Think about your personal medical history
  - Current medical conditions
  - Past illnesses, medical procedures, and surgeries
  - Your family’s medical history
- Bring test results, records from other physicians, and insurance information
  - Be conservative when bringing documents from your personal research. Doctors need the freedom to perform their own independent assessment without being sidetracked by other information.
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- You may want to ask a family member or friend to go with you
  - Companions can provide support and take notes in the examining room
- Consistency is important, so bring the same family member or friend to your various appointments
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

A typical appointment includes:

- Preliminaries where medical staff record your weight, height, and blood pressure
- A few minutes of discussion with your physician during which you explain the reason for your visit
- An examination by the doctor
- A review of findings and the treatment plan, if needed
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- During the consultation phase of the appointment a laboratory test or screening procedure may be required
  - Ask the doctor how the procedure will be performed
  - What information will be gained
  - What are the risks
  - How accurate are the results of the test
  - How and when will you receive the results and what to do if you don’t receive them
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- During the discussion phase of your appointment the doctor may write a prescription for a new medication
  - Tell your doctor about any reactions you have had to medications in the past
  - Ask questions about your new prescription
  - Ask what the new medication is supposed to do and whether it might interact with any supplements or other medications that you are taking
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- Inquire about the mechanics of the medication
  - How much, when, and how long to take it
  - What if a dose is missed or too much is taken
  - What will happen if the medication is not taken
  - What are the side effects and what to do if they occur
  - Should certain foods, drinks, or activities be avoided
  - To save money, ask whether a generic form of the medication is available
Getting the Most Out of an Appointment with Your Doctor

- When picking up medication from the pharmacy
  - Verify it is the one prescribed by your doctor
  - Ask remaining questions about the new medication to the pharmacist
  - Take personal responsibility for reading and understanding drug labels

- Read labels at least every time you open a new bottle of medication
Figure 1a.4 Tips for reading drug labels. (a) Prescription drug label.

- Pharmacy name and address
- Doctor's name
- Drugstore phone number
- Prescription fill date
- Number used by the drugstore to identify this drug for your refills
- Person who gets this drug
- Instructions about how often and when to take this drug
- Name of drug and strength of drug
- Number of refills before certain date
- Don't use this drug past this date
- Local Pharmacy
  123 MAIN STREET
  ANYTOWN, USA 11111
  800-555-5555

NO 0060023-08291

DATE 06/23/09

JANE SMITH
456 MAIN STREET ANYTOWN, US 11111

TAKE ONE CAPSULE BY MOUTH THREE TIMES DAILY FOR 10 DAYS UNTIL ALL TAKEN

AMOXICILLIN 500MG CAPSULES

QTY MRG
NO REFILLS - DR. AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED
USE BEFORE 06/23/12
SLF/SLF

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Figure 1a.4 Tips for reading drug labels. (b) Over-the-counter drug label.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug Facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active ingredient (in each tablet)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlorpheniramine maleate 2 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ sneezing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Warnings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ glaucoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Avoid alcoholic drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Alcohol, sedatives, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Excitability may occur, especially in children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ If pregnant or breastfeeding, ask a health professional before use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 6 years to under 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other information</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Protect from excessive moisture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inactive ingredients</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therapeutic substance in drug
Symptoms or diseases the drug treats
When not to use this drug, when to stop taking it, when to see a doctor, and possible side effects
Read carefully: how much to take, how often to take it, and when to stop taking it
More information on how to store the drug
Other things in the drug, such as colors or flavorings
Finding a Specialist and Getting a Second Opinion

- Should you need to see a specialist
  - Ask for a referral from the doctor
  - Use online resources to personally search for information
    - American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) lists board-certified specialists and includes information about their education
    - WebMD site provides a directory of physicians, including specialists, when you type in the city and state or zip code
Finding a Specialist

- Key questions to ask when meeting with a specialist
  - Board certification
  - How often was the procedure performed in the past year (needs to be frequently)
  - How many of these procedures were performed overall and what the success rate has been
  - Other treatment options and the benefits and risks of the proposed treatment
Getting a Second Opinion

- Seeking a second opinion to research all options
- You can get another specialist from:
  - The doctor who provided the initial diagnosis
  - Personal search
- To get a truly independent assessment, it is best to obtain a second opinion from a physician who is not connected with your doctor
Getting a Second Opinion

- Most health insurance plans cover second opinions and if not, it may be very worthwhile
- When should you get a second opinion?
  - When the plan requires second opinions before they will pay for a major medical procedure
  - When a diagnosis is based on a test that does not always provide conclusive results
  - When suggested treatments are invasive (surgery) or long term
  - When there is sufficient time for a second opinion
Appointing a Health Care Agent

- It is difficult to predict medical situations, it is best to be prepared in advance

- A health care agent
  - Acts as your legal representative
  - Has the right to make health care decisions for you if your doctor decides you are unable to make them yourself
    - Whether to have medical tests and treatments
    - When to start and stop treatments
Appointing a Health Care Agent

- All adults should select a willing health care agent to discuss their health care wishes
  - Requires you to understand various treatment options to evaluate their costs and benefits
  - Make informed decisions
  - Inform your agent of your wishes
- Each state has its own laws to convey in advance your wishes for end-of-life care
Appointing a Health Care Agent

- The health care agent must be
  - At least 18 years old
  - Not your physician or an employee of the health care organization providing your care
  - An exception is made if the employee is a family member
Appointing a Health Care Agent

- To select the health care agent
  - Complete a health care proxy form
    - A legal document, that health care providers are required to follow its instructions
  - Provide a copy to your agent, family members, loved ones, and primary care physician
  - The form can be updated if necessary
Selecting a Hospital and Staying Safe

- Should the treatment require hospitalization, a major step in your care is selecting the hospital
  - Make your choice with your doctor
  - Know as much as possible about the hospital
    - Some specialize in treating patients of a certain age group
    - Others specialize in treating certain medical conditions
  - Check the accreditation status
    - The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) evaluates staff, facilities and equipment, information management, and success in treating patients
Selecting a Hospital and Staying Safe

- Checking the accreditation status
  - Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)
  - Federal and state governments
  - Nonprofit organizations
  - Private companies and organizations
    - All offer reports and other tools to compare hospitals
- Make sure the hospital is covered by your health plan
Selecting a Hospital and Staying Safe

- Medical errors can happen any place that you receive health care or medications
  - A 1999 report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) raised public awareness of medical errors
  - Between 44,000 and 98,000 people die each year in the United States as a result of medical errors in hospitals.
    - Higher than death from either car accidents (about 43,500) or breast cancer (about 42,300)
Selecting a Hospital and Staying Safe

- Medical errors
  - From incorrect or incomplete diagnosis or treatment
  - May involve laboratory tests, equipment, surgery, or medication
- Medical errors in hospitals were still common in 2011
- Be vigilant and informed about your health care
- Understand all aspects of your discharge plan
  - List of follow-up appointments, tests, and medications
  - Timetable for resuming normal activities
  - Steps to take if a problem arises
Researching Health Conditions on Your Own

- Finding other reliable sources of information:
  - Internet, be sure to
    - Scrutinize websites
    - Avoid those that are selling products or making claims inconsistent with information from other sources
    - Check that the person or group making the claims has the necessary scientific or medical training and expertise
  - Search for articles in the primary medical literature
    - You may be able to understand enough of the information to ask your doctor about it
You Should Now Be Able To:

- Understand how MDs and DOs obtain their diploma
- Select a primary care physician you are comfortable with
- Prepare your appointment with your doctor
- Find a specialist and look for a second opinion
- Appoint a health care agent that will insure your wishes are fulfilled
- Scrutinize to select a hospital that will keep you safe
- Research health conditions on your own