

Hope & Healing

Doctors Talking With Your Doctor

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

Doctors like to make diagnoses. They love to tell you what's wrong with you. And, even with all the sophisticated means of gathering information about your body, the best help still comes from what you tell the doctor. What counts most during the visit to your doctor is the story of your illness. It contains the clues that lead to the diagnosis.

Actually, for complicated situations, your doctor will not have a diagnosis to begin with. He or she develops a "working hypothesis" that is flexible and can be changed as tests are completed and new information is reported. Even when the problem is a complicated one, however, nothing can substitute for the history collected by the doctor from you.

To get the most from your visit, put your symptoms in a concise, organized description. Don't waste your time and money by adding irrelevant details. And, don't be your own worst enemy by failing to mention fears that you might have. Don't hesitate to bring up certain problems that you are reluctant to discuss. Once you have your story organized, rehearse it, so that you can tell what, when and how the problem developed. You may want to take notes.

The Medical History _____

Your doctor listens to your story and in his or her mind organizes the details to see if they fit a particular disease. The information is collected and organized under five headings:

- The Chief Complaint
- The Present Illness
- The Past Medical History

- The Review of Systems
- The Social History

The Chief Complaint _____

This is when the doctor asks, "What's the problem?" The answer may be "I have a sore throat" or "I'm short of breath." It's the title of your story. You may have more than one problem. If so, tell your doctor. If, for instance, your head hurts, you have a fever, and you have a cough, say so. The doctor can then formulate the working hypothesis from three symptoms, knowing that all three are related.

Be honest. If you fear cancer, or if you have a sexual problem, say so. No good comes from the doctor being misled because of your reluctance. Give the real reason for your visit. No one will laugh at you or think less of you. An honest title to your story is required, otherwise the doctor's ability to help is compromised.

The Present Illness _____

Now, the question is "When did this problem begin?" Be sure you know the answer in advance. The answer may be "about the middle of June" or "last night at 11:30" or you may be vague on this point. If so, say so. "I'm not sure," you may say, "my joints began hurting about November" and "I got tired in February," and "now I've got this rash." The doctor can determine the starting point from facts you tell him or her.

Next, begin to unfold the story, highlighting the important events as they seem to you, in short, clear sentences, and without adding irrelevant details.

Your doctor may interrupt to ask

specific questions. And when you finish, other questions may be raised about points you didn't cover. When there is more than one problem your doctor may direct the questioning to formulate the entire story into the working hypothesis.

Important details to always add:

- Medications taken during the illness, prescription and non-prescription.
- Whether you could be or are pregnant.
- If tests or x-rays were done at an emergency department or other facility.
- Allergies to drugs.

The Past Medical History _____

What your doctor wants to know is the names of specific diagnoses made in the past, the known medical problems you have been treated for. These may have developed in several ways:

- As an interruption in your general good health.
- As an operation.
- As an admission to a hospital.
- As a complication to a medicine.
- As a consequence of an accident.

Be thorough when reporting medications. Allergies and the use of birth control pills, vitamins, laxatives, and aspirin are often not mentioned.

The Review of Systems _____

This is a survey of each body system through standard questions. The doctor is looking for additional clues to round out the working hypothesis.

The Social History _____

Here, the doctor asks questions about your job, family, stresses in your life, the use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs and sexual activity. Additionally, any exposure to toxic chemicals is very important. Even though some of these questions are very personal, they are not asked in idle curiosity. The answers can be of great importance in determining the cause of your illness.

The Importance of a Well-Told Story _____

The doctor searches for the cause of your illness through your story, the physical examination, and tests. One cannot replace another. Each has a part to play. If your story is clear and organized, the more accurate the working hypothesis will be and the fewer expensive tests will be required to accurately diagnose and successfully treat your problem. If you are a keen observer of yourself, your reporting of the details can greatly help the doctor.

How to Become a Keen Observer of Yourself _____

Learn a few useful and interesting things about your body. The following are well to know:

- For a fever, buy a thermometer. Practice using it. When you report to the doctor about "running a temperature," give the exact reading.
- Learn to feel your pulse at the angle of your jaw in your neck or at your wrist. If you develop palpitations, see

if the beats are regular, irregular, fast or slow. Is the heart skipping a beat occasionally, or is it totally irregular? An irregular pulse is often gone by the time you get to the doctor, but you can know and can tell.

- Know your skin. If a mole grows larger or becomes darker or a sore fails to heal, ask your doctor to examine it.
- For Women Only. Know how your breasts feel. Carefully examine them every month to detect changes. If you detect a suspicious lump let your doctor know immediately.
- For Men Only. Know what your testicles feel like. Examine them for enlargements monthly as you shower. Report suspicious areas immediately if you locate any.
- Weight. Know what your normal weight is. If your weight changes, know by how much and over what period it changed. Changes in weight can be very important, especially weight loss.

Summary _____

In all relationships, honesty is the best policy. Honesty implies trust and trust, in turn, implies confidence. If your doctor is to take proper care of you, he or she should know about things you may be reluctant to discuss. Ask that they be left out of the record. This will in no way disrupt the relationship between you and your doctor and can ease your fears that someone else may find out what you want kept private.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Creativity

What do you think about before dropping off to sleep?

It's important to day dream before you close your eyes. What's you fantasize will often materialize. So be positive. Francis Scott Key heard the melody for the "Star Spangled Banner" in his dreams.

Don't be so busy getting through the day that you don't daydream. In school we're called away from daydreams by our teachers. That's wrong. Daydreaming is good.

The fact is that when you daydream, your brain goes out to play. That's what creativity is — intelligence having fun.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.