

Aging Lifestyles: This book is just what the doctor ordered

by Joe_Volz

Do you ever get the impression that your doctor is rushing you through his examination while you still have a few more questions?

Dr. Terrie Wurzbacher agrees with you. And she has just written a book about the problem called "Your Doctor Said What?" (Lifesuccess Publishing), 8900 E. Pinnacle Peak Road, Suite D240, Scottsdale, AZ 8522, e-mail.

Wurzbacher, a retired Navy captain who spent 29 years as a doctor, says, "Patients feel rushed through the system. They feel judged by the doctors and often criticized. They feel the doctors don't communicate with them and they have been yelled at for not doing exactly as the doctor says."

Wurzbacher has seen both sides of the matter. Not only has she been a physician for a long time but she has been a patient, too. She says the "surprising thing that she has learned from many disgruntled patients is that they actually "felt that the doctor did have their best interests at heart," despite the negative experiences they had.

Wurzbacher says her conclusions are based not so much on learned studies but on her own observations.

Well, since Wurzbacher values personal anecdotes, I have a few myself. I have found over my 50 years as an adult patient in New Jersey, Maryland and Washington, D.C., that doctors vary so greatly in their bedside manner that it is very difficult to generalize the way I have been treated at some of the best hospitals in the country, such as George Washington University Medical Center, where a 15-minute rule is strictly enforced. If I didn't see the doctor in 15 minutes, the receptionist came out with an explanation as to why and how much longer the wait would be.

On the other hand, when I signed up with an endocrinologist in a small town practice in Frederick, Md., I was twice kept waiting for an hour, with no explanation. I fired that gentleman, even though it meant driving 20 miles down the road to a doctor, who not only was well-qualified but would see me on time. And I developed my own rule of thumb: If the doctor was not available in half an hour, I announced I was leaving. It was amazing how often the tardy physician then found time to see me.

Anyhow, Wurzbacher has come up with her own suggestions on how to get the most out of your brief tie with your doctor. She says the average length of a doctor's visit is 15 to 20 minutes. So, you really have to do you best to communicate with your doctor clearly and concisely.

But she concedes that often, "The phrase, doctor-patient communication is an oxymoron."

Here are her tips:

- Be prepared for your appointment. That means making lists of your medications and your current and past medical problems. Write down any questions you have.

- Don't downplay your symptoms. Too often a patient, who was having a heart attack, successfully convinced the doctor that it was just indigestion.

- Don't blame everything on age. If you are having trouble sleeping, for example, mention it.

- Be honest about everything. That includes what over-the-counter drugs you are taking and whether or not you have stuck to your diet. If you stopped taking your medications a couple of weeks ago and shifted to herbal medicines, recommended by a friend, let your doctor know.

- Above all, do not be afraid to ask questions. If you don't understand anything the doctor is saying ask for clarification. Ask about side effects of medications. Ask what's wrong with you and insist the doctor explain it so you understand. You deserve answers.

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