

## The Physician-Patient “Tug of War”

### *Part Two*

A large amount of research strongly suggests there are specific behaviors that patients can adopt to improve communication with their physicians, ultimately improving their health and satisfaction. Physicians can establish environments that promote these important behaviors and help patients to communicate better by encouraging them to:

1. Spend time before their appointments thinking about their symptoms, concerns and developing a clear description. For example, if the patient says, “I think I have bronchitis,” lead him/her to express brief but focused facts like, “I’ve been coughing for two weeks.”
2. Jot down questions in advance.
3. Help prioritize multiple complaints and commit to a follow-up plan for each.
4. Explain how the illness translates into real life, specific issues. Instead of “I’m getting worse,” lead the patient to something like, “We’re buying milk in quarts, because I can’t lift gallons anymore.”
5. Learn more about their illnesses by directing them into patient-education programs and support groups. Provide materials and audiovisuals and review the materials they bring to you. Some practices actually encourage the patient to send the materials before the appointment so the doctor can prepare.
6. Bring a family member or close friend. These people can serve as patient advocates, often remembering things that patients do not, as well as helping to keep track of what was said during the visit.
7. Work with the physician to establish realistic treatment goals. Remember, even when a cure is impossible, healing may be. While medical science has its limits, hope does not.

Use the above recommendations to help improve patient/physician communication, which may foster a relationship between equals and improve the potential for a true healing partnership.

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