

# How Informed Are You?

## Primary Care Physician (PCP)

### Look for a PCP who:

- Meets your needs/preferences (internist, OB-GYN, pediatrician)
- Is board certified in his or her selected specialty
- Is part of a medical home
- Is respected in the community; has a good reputation (use your network)
- Has good communication skills
- Provides information and support about your problem
- Is known to use tests/procedures and medications appropriately
- Based on your health needs, advises when immunizations are recommended (e.g., influenza, HPV)
- Has hospital privileges at a local or nearby facility, or at your hospital of choice
- Schedules reasonable appointment times for sick visits (in less than five days)
- Can be contacted by phone or e-mail
- Has established office hours after regular work hours
- Has a responsive and courteous office staff
- Has acceptable waiting room time

## A Quality Office Visit

### Question the need

- Is an office visit necessary?

### Come prepared

- What is your main complaint or health status since your last visit?
- What are your symptoms? When did they begin?
- Do you have a history of this problem?
- What are the possible causes?
- What treatment have you tried in the past—self-care and/or medical?

- What is your family medical history?
- What makes the problem seem worse?
- What medications (e.g., prescription and/or over-the-counter) and nutritional supplements are you taking? Are they working?
- What's your problem or current health status?
- Are other tests/procedures recommended?
- What is your treatment plan?
- Do you need to add or change medication(s)?
- Should you consider lifestyle changes—increasing activity, improving nutrition, quitting smoking?
- Answer questions to the best of your ability.
- Write down your doctor's recommendations.
- Be sure you understand your health status or recommended treatment plan.

## Talking with Your Doctor

### Remember

- Write down your questions before your visit.
- Don't be reluctant to question the need for tests, procedures, or medications.
- Be sure you understand your treatment plan fully, including medication use and recommendations for lifestyle changes.
- Don't be intimidated. Ask questions with confidence.
- When in doubt, is a second opinion an option?
- Expect to feel uncertain.

## Medication Use

### Remember

- Take all medications/supplements (e.g., prescription, over-the-counter, nutritional supplements) or a list of their names to show your doctor. Along with your insurance card, show your doctor your pharmacy insurance card.

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# How Informed Are You?

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- When a medication is prescribed:
  - Learn the name of the drug. Write it down.
  - Learn what to expect from the medication. Some medications take longer than others before you feel better. Others will require a lab test to reveal how they are working.
  - Be sure you know the proper dosage and schedule.
  - Learn any special instructions (e.g., on an empty stomach, with food, after a meal, no alcohol).
  - Learn about possible side effects.
  - Be sure you know what other drugs/supplements to avoid.
  - Show your pharmacy card.
- Don't change the dosage or schedule without talking with your doctor.
- Don't share your prescription or borrow another person's medication.
- Complete the full course of your treatment; don't stop because you feel better or you think the medication is not working.
- Report unexpected side effects to your doctor.
- Review any new medications with your pharmacist.
- Contact your pharmacy or mail-order house to order prescription refills before you run out of medication.

## **INFORMED: Medical Decision-Making Process™**

**INFORMED<sup>3</sup>** is the eight-step process that will help you and your doctor consider options—including benefits and costs—for your health decisions.

### **The Benefits**

- Effective communication with your doctor and other healthcare providers
- Active participation/partnership in your own care or a loved one's care

- Confidence and trust in your care and treatment
- Improved quality and satisfaction

### **The INFORMED Process**

**I**nput

**N**eed

**F**act-Finding

**O**ptions

**R**ecommended Treatment

**M**anagement

**E**xpense

**D**ecision

### **Input**

What is my problem?

- What is my diagnosis? If the diagnosis is not known, what could possibly be causing my symptoms?
- Are further tests recommended?
- Is a treatment recommended at this time?
- Is surgery recommended?
- Is hospitalization required?

### **Need**

Your healthcare provider may suggest the need for:

- Further evaluation to make a diagnosis
- Specific treatment recommendations. Ask:
  - Why do I need treatment?
  - Why do I need a particular test(s)? How will it affect my outcome?
  - What do I want (expect) from my treatment?
  - Are my expectations realistic?
  - What do I need to do next?

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# How Informed Are You?

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## **Fact-Finding**

- Besides consulting with my doctor, what other information and resources do I need to learn more about the problem and make a more informed decision?
- Do I understand how my doctor has explained my diagnosis or recommended treatment?
- Do I need further explanation?
- Would a second opinion be useful to confirm my diagnosis and treatment?

## **Options**

Based on my fact-finding, what options are available for treating my health problem? For each option:

- Discuss the potential risks and benefits of each option with your doctor.
- What if I do nothing (“watchful waiting”)?
- Can options be ranked from least aggressive (e.g., do nothing) to most aggressive (e.g., surgery)?

## **Recommended Treatment**

Based on the available options, what is my doctor recommending, and why?

- Medications and specific schedules
- Tests and procedures (e.g., surgery)
- Lifestyle changes (e.g., increasing physical activity, improving nutrition, stopping smoking)

## **Management**

For the recommended treatment, understand your responsibilities for managing your condition, including:

- Short-term management (e.g., nursing needs, medication, rehabilitation, chemotherapy, radiation, lifestyle changes)
- Long-term management (e.g., follow-up tests, medications, lifestyle changes, health coaching or disease management counseling)

## **Expense**

For the recommended treatment, understand the:

- Financial costs: out-of-pocket medical costs, lost wages, future medical/treatment costs
- Emotional costs: distress, depression, isolation, poorer quality of life
- Physical costs: loss of independence, poorer quality of life, disfigurement/scarring, complications

## **Decision**

Before making your decision:

- Have you discussed all treatment options with your healthcare provider(s)?
- Do you understand why a specific treatment plan is being recommended and what your responsibilities are?
- Do you have any other questions about your recommended treatment plan?
- Do you understand that your treatment plan may change, based on your condition and progress?
- Are you committed to following your treatment plan? If not, what are your concerns? Have you raised your concerns with your healthcare provider(s)?

## **In Summary**

### **Remember**

- Be an active partner with your doctor when making decisions that affect your health.
- The best way to get quality care is to become more involved in your care plan.
- Committing to following your treatment plan will improve not only the quality of your care, but also your satisfaction and confidence.

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# How Informed Are You?

INFORMED Option Worksheet			
	OPTION ONE	OPTION TWO	OPTION THREE
Treatment	Do nothing (watchful waiting*)		
Benefits			
Risks			
Management			
Expense			
Treatment your doctor is recommending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* Watchful waiting involves no medical or surgical treatment. You continue to watch your symptoms to see if they improve, get worse, or stay the same over a specified period of time. Based on your observations, your doctor may advise further treatment.

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