

A Partnership With Your Doctor

Today, the relationship between doctors and patients is different than it was in the past, with patients today taking a much more active role in managing their healthcare. Good two-way communication between you and your doctor can ensure that you understand what the doctor is saying, and that you take an active role in the steps needed to get care. It is also more likely today than in the past that more than one doctor is involved in your care. Although you may have a primary care physician who sees you for common problems and who is often involved in your care for a long time, at some time you may also visit a specialist, a doctor that is called in for his or her particular expertise with certain diseases or conditions. Good communication is important so that all of your doctors know about any conditions for which you are being treated or medications you are taking.

Doctors and patients have much more of a partnership nowadays, and work together to make sure that patients receive the very best healthcare available. The better your relationship with your doctor, the more likely you are to be satisfied with your care. By asking questions and confirming understandings, you can improve outcomes by making sure your doctors have as much information as possible, that you understand what the doctor is telling you, and that necessary follow-ups take place.

So—how do you get started communicating with your doctor? Here are some ideas from the National Institutes of Health (NIH):

- Write down the questions you have ahead of time, take them with you on a doctor's visit, and write down the answers
- Take someone with you to your appointment if you need help
- Bring a list of all medications you are taking including over the counter drugs and supplements and vitamins, and tell your doctor
- Take notes during the discussion, or bring a tape recorder to help you recollect what was said
- Ask the doctor to write his or her instructions to you
- Ask for printed material about your condition
- If you still have trouble understanding, ask where to go for more information
- For more information, call the APWU Health Plan Nurse Advisory Line at 888/993-0333
- Consult APWU Health Plan's online health library from the Mayo Clinic at www.apwuhp.com
- Talk to nurses and pharmacists—they can be good sources of information too