

What Your Doctor May Not Be Telling You

Accepting, without question, decisions your doctor makes about your medical care may be unhealthy.

If you do not ask about drugs being prescribed for you or the reason for certain medical tests — or worse yet, if you blindly go ahead with surgery — you could come down with a case of "iatrogenesis," otherwise known as a doctor-induced illness.

The fact that physicians can make people sick is rarely discussed publicly, though articles about tragic doctor errors routinely appear in medical journals. Most people have the false sense of confidence that, no matter what, the doctor knows best.

In truth, says Dr. David T. Nash, a cardiologist and clinical professor of medicine at Upstate Medical Center, University Hospital, Syracuse, N.Y., "Although American medicine today is the most technically sophisticated, it can also be hazardous to your health."

The primary risks are from over-prescription of drugs, questionable use of medical tests and X rays, incorrect diagnoses, hospital-incubated infections and surgery.

According to Dr. Nash, the surest way to avoid becoming a victim of iatrogenesis is for individuals to "become more knowledgeable, active partners in their own health care."

Specifically, he recommends the following:

- Staying well through common-sense practices, rather than relying on medicine to cure bad habits, is your best guarantee to a longer, healthier life.
- Become a vocal, informed self-advocate in your medical care. It is your right to refuse an X ray, test or treatment that you are not convinced is needed. If your doctor does not like to be questioned, find another one who will accept you as a partner in your treatment.
- Ask about any medication prescribed. Find out its name, what it is expected to do, what side effects it may cause and whether any other substances you are taking will interfere with it. Make sure you tell the doctor any drug sensitivities you have. Take only those drugs that are absolutely necessary.
- Ask what the doctor hopes to learn from proposed laboratory tests or X rays, what the benefits and risks are, and the costs. What will happen if you do not have it done? Are there alternatives?
- When surgery is recommended, ask why. Find out if nonsurgical options are available and how often the particular operation is performed. Other questions to ask: Will the surgery be done by a senior staff surgeon? How often has the surgeon performed the operation? Also, it is advisable to get a second opinion from a board-certified specialist who does not practice in the same office or hospital as the first doctor.

For a free reprint of "The Disease Doctors Don't Talk About," write to Reprints Editor, Reader's Digest, Box 25, Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570.

Give your favorite doctor a ring

An amazing percentage of visits to the doctor are unnecessary, most health problems are "self limiting," which means that they go away by themselves and there isn't much, if anything, you (or modern medicine) can do to hasten their departure.

It's sometimes hard to tell whether you should take two aspirin and go to bed, or go to the trouble and expense of a doctor's visit, however, and that's where the phone comes in handy. Good doctors never insist on seeing their patients unnecessarily, and they're always happy to make self-care recommendations over the phone when it's appropriate.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR DOCTOR'S RECEPTIONIST THINK YOU'RE TERRIFIC

If you're organized and prepared when you call your doctor's office, you'll win the respect and appreciation of the receptionist, which will make the telephone help that much more efficient.

1. Introduce yourself. State briefly (one sentence) why you're calling. ("I've had a fever of 101° for three days and I was wondering if there's something else I should be doing about it.")* If you don't think your problem needs to be seen by the doctor, say so.

2. Be prepared to answer (use notes!):

- What are the specific symptoms?
- When (what day/what time) did the symptoms start?
- What have you done for relief, if anything? (Refer to notes for names of medications. Don't forget to mention over-the-counter medications.)
- Why are you worried?/How would you like us to help you?

3. Have a pencil in hand to take



Members of Links, Inc., Portland Chapter, invited community members to view and discuss the video tape "Babies Having Babies". Ideas from

discussion will be used to form strategies for combating the problem of teen pregnancies.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

ATTENTION

Secure Horizons is a senior health plan. Join us at one of our seminars to find out how you can reduce out-of-pocket health care expenses: September 22—Providence Milwaukie Hospital (Dwyer), 10 am; September 25—St. Vincent Hospital, 10 am; September 26—Emanuel Hospital, 10 am; September 29—Woodland Park Hospital, 10 am; September 30—Meridian Park Hospital, 2 pm.

For reservations call: 620-8934 or 1-800-624-6050.

Secure Horizons is a non-profit Medicare Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) program offered through community physicians and hospitals. Please call, if you would like further information.

CALENDAR ANNOUNCEMENT

Red Rose School classes will be starting the week of October 13. Classes include: The Struggle Against Apartheid, Mon; Womens Leadership Development, Mon; The International Green Movement, Tues; Intentional Communities, Wed; Hanford and U.S. Nuclear Policy, Thur; Abortion and Feminism, Sun. All classes start at 7:30 P.M. Registration is \$20.00 ahead of time, \$25.00 when classes start, sliding scale for unemployed. COURSES RUN UP TO EIGHT WEEKS. For more information regarding location or anything else, call 230-0488.



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