

## When You Should Ask to Speak to Your Physician

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Unfortunately, not all illnesses respond to treatment in the manner which is desired by the physician and/or patient. On the other hand, fortunately, most illnesses will respond “correctly” in a predictable manner. In fact, a significant number will get better with NO treatment.

As physicians our role is to evaluate the patient and to decide if a specific diagnostic or treatment plan is indicated. We then make the diagnosis, decide upon the treatment, administer it and watch to determine the course of the diseases- namely, if the patient gets better or worse and if any change is indicated.

With the wide range of diseases, as well as the various ways in which they present themselves and respond, the diagnosis of the diseases and deciding upon the treatment is simply the beginning of the role of the physician. Fortunately, most abnormal conditions respond well to treatment. We must recognize that even though the response is encouraging, the disease may not continue to get better and may actually, get worse. Obviously, it is necessary to observe the patient to determine the path he or she will follow. As referring physicians.

There is no physician who knows “everything”. Recognizing this it is essential to let all patients know, from the outset that if he or she doesn’t respond as expected or gets worse he or she must recontact the physician earlier rather than later. From the practical standpoint every patient must observe him or herself to determine if how he or she is responding is what is to be expected or not. If unusual it is often required to reevaluate the patient to determine if a different manner of treatment is indicated. The patient must evaluate him- or herself continually and report his or her progress.

If we refer you back to your physician, that physician might handle the problem or might refer you elsewhere if needed. No matter what you should know who to contact if you have further questions or need further care.

We have all heard of patients who have had “relapses”. This means that patients are not truly “discharged” since their underlying illness may “lie low” and “pop” up again later. In these situations, the patient should keep in touch with the physician and let him or her decide if you are progressing normally or need further evaluation or a change in treatment.

In certain conditions the physician will give you written information about your condition and what to expect. Fortunately, almost everyone has access to the Internet and may find the answers to many questions there.

Communication with your physician is essential. Notify the office immediately if your condition isn’t progressing as expected, especially if it is getting worse. From the practical standpoint try, you should know your physician’s preference to decide to go to the Emergency Room or your doctor’s office as early as possible if you have a concern, especially in larger teaching areas.

I always preferred that patients call me BEFORE going to the emergency room. When possible it is much more efficient, quicker and usually much less expensive.

If you need special consultations there is a greater likelihood of the specialists being available earlier in the day. We are all busy, but do appreciate consideration for our time. Call your physician early in the day, if possible, so that there is time for the office staff to convey the information to him or her and to contact you if there is something specific to be done.

If the physician is going to be occupied for several hours, it is usually much nicer to wait at home if possible, assuming that it is not dangerous for your health problem. Many physicians' offices have a protocol that they prefer. When going to a new office find out how the physician prefers to handle urgent or out-of-hours care to make it easier on you, the patient, as well as the physician.

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