

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Contact: John Lough email: ACAcornet@counseling.org

Are You Getting The Most Out Of That Visit To Your Doctor?

from the American Counseling Association

As we get closer to the end of the year, many families find themselves facing more visits to the family physician, or dentist, or eye doctor. It might be due to insurance deadlines, increased levels of the colds and flu which come with the season, or just catching up on health issues that you put aside, hoping they would just go away.

Whatever the case, visits to a health practitioner often make people nervous and anxious, not only because of the possible health problems that may be present, but also because many of us are unsure of how to deal with a busy doctor and all the medical jargon, tests and procedures we simply don't understand.

But this anxiety can be minimized. One way is to adopt an attitude that professional counselors call "appropriately assertive." This starts by remembering that the person you're seeing is actually working for you -- you, or your insurance company, is paying him or her for the time and expertise they share with you.

"Appropriately assertive" means speaking clearly and directly about the issues on your mind. Understanding that the doctor has a busy schedule should not stand in the way of getting your concerns addressed.

To make things easier, make a list of those questions before getting to your health professional's office. Tell your doctor you have issues to discuss and ask if he or she wants to do so before or after your exam. And if your doctor answers your questions in terms you don't fully understand, don't just pretend you get what's being said. Rather, politely ask for clarification.

It's not uncommon for people in white coats to unintentionally make the rest of us feel nervous during an office visit. If you find that happens to you and you can't always remember a diagnosis or instructions, ask if a friend or family member can come along as a second set of ears. Most doctors will say yes immediately.

Your goal is open communications between you and your health practitioner. You want to be able to ask follow-up questions, to clarify unclear information and to leave the office confident that you've understood what has happened and what you were told.

Being prepared and willing to be proactive when you visit a medical professional can help ensure that you are getting the care you require.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

###