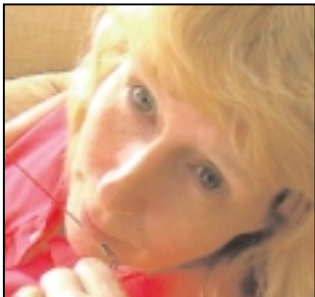


remarks

I Want a Good Doctor One patient advocates mutual respect between physicians and patients. She asks that her doctor help her stay well by answering her questions, offering encouragement, and writing down instructions.

BY LINDA CROSS



WE ALL KNOW THAT DOCTORS are busy people. (Frankly, we're getting tired of hearing it.) Most of us want to take responsibility for our own health, but we do need professional guidance, and—dare I say it?—that's what we're paying you for.

Sometime in the 1970s we declared you no-longer-God, and grabbed the controls. We took haughty offense about our valuable time

Dr. Good 888-888-8888		Date: 08/02/01	
Reason: Annual physical		Return by: 11/02/01	
Health Concerns:	Smoking!	Cholesterol 220	Stress
Prescribed or Recommended	Chest X-ray Monitor number Daily and bring chart to next appointment.	Track -300 mg. and daily 1-mile walk. New blood test before next appointment.	Daily 1-mile walk. Bring record to next visit.
Call Before Return if:	Cough worsens	Any listed possible side effects from medication occur.	
Current Medications:		Lipitor	
Health Improvement Goals -short term -long term	Reduce smoking	Cholesterol 200	Manage stress
	Stop smoking	Cholesterol 190	Reduce stress

when expected to spend more than ten minutes in your waiting room. We asked what the little blue pill was for, what it could do, and even what it was.

Our bodies became ourselves, and we requested specialists by name. If we couldn't get you to speak in words we understood, well, there were medical dictio-

naries and pill books, and even PDRs on our bookshelves at home. Before long, we were expecting a medical education in the space of an office visit, bringing you magazine articles about how some other doctor handled symptoms like ours, and, in short, letting you know just how inadequate we thought you were. Is this, maybe, your revenge?

I don't blame you. A little knowledge turned out to be, if not dangerous, a very irritating thing. We all lost something important. You aren't the plumber, and we're sorry we've been treating you like you were. We hire a plumber to fix our pipes, and we rely on his expertise. If he fails to do the job properly, we stop

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payment and hire another plumber to do it right. Nowhere in this process does our faith in the plumber's ability actually affect the result.

Not so with medicine. Our faith in you, our belief that you really care about our health, is vital. We still have our books, plus the Internet. We are much more informed than we used to be, but this has served to teach us how little we actually know, and how much we need you. And, let's face it, our lives have become so hectic that many of us actually appreciate some extra magazine-reading time in your waiting room.

A recent TV commercial for a weight-loss drug shows a young girl, then a woman. The narrator says: "Your doctor cared about your health then, he cares about it now." We see this commercial and think: "Oh, if only!"

The time is right to renew our faith. It will be a more educated faith, and a more balanced relationship. We still want to know what the little blue pill is, but much more, we want to believe that you are prescribing it because it's good for us. We want to know that you are a good doctor. That we have a good doctor.

When I say I really want a good doctor, I mean I'd like:

- One who asks if I'm still smoking, and if I am, orders tests and offers a new suggestion. Even something as simple as keeping a record of cigarettes smoked daily that I must bring back in a month.
- One who asks if I'm exercising, dieting, monitoring my blood pressure, etc., and, again, offers suggestions and asks me to keep track.
- One who asks if there is any extra stress in my life right now, and if there is, offers just one stress management technique for me to try.
- One who sends me for any necessary

tests or blood work when I schedule my appointment, then discusses the results at the time of my examination.

- One who actually reads the report my specialist sent for the file.
- One who does a thorough examination.
- One who tells me when to come back, emphasizes that I should mark my calendar to schedule that appointment, or sends a reminder card.
- One who has more signs posted about health than about dire penalties for returned checks.
- One who never laughs at, or brushes off, a concern that has obviously taken me some courage to raise.
- One who respects my dignity by having office staff members who make personal inquiries privately, rather than within hearing of other patients in the waiting room.
- One who respects my time by keeping a reasonable schedule and providing notice if my wait will exceed half an hour.
- One who cares.

Is that you?

When we patients leave a hospital, we are given discharge instructions. A similar document when we leave our doctor's office would be very effective. The notes could be made in the chart during your examination, and copied on a card like the one on page 84 for us to insert in our planners or take home and post on our refrigerators. ■

Linda Cross is actually a patient patient. While searching for her good doctor, she helps all sorts of doctors with their communications needs as [Cross Concepts—A Writing Service for Leaders](#), which can be found on the Internet at www.crossconcepts.net.

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