# Medical System – How to Get What You Need

Nancy Lane, MN, CS, BC, NP Senior Health <u>Dimensions</u>

### In Another Country – The Difference between Parents and Children

- Older adults were raised with the belief that the doctor is always right
- They have not been consistently assertive especially in medical situations
- May be afraid "to hurt his/her feelings"
- "But she is such a nice young woman"
- Being proactive in health care is a new concept

#### How to Be Proactive in Health Care

- View yourself as a consumer with rights and choices
- Become well-informed and willing to be a full partner with the physician
- Locate various sources of additional information prior to visits
- Have realistic expectations about the type of care you will receive
- Understand what you must do to ensure that your needs are met

#### **Preparing for Office Visits**

- Ask older adult or parent if you may accompany to MD
- Encourage parent to be more proactive
- Bring to the visit your list of symptoms
- Write it down in the following format:
  - When the symptom started, how long you have had it
  - Describe the type of symptom: location, duration, intensity
  - Can you relate it to anything else (activity, food, and other symptoms)
  - What makes it worse?
  - What makes it better?

### **Preparing for Office Visits (cont.)**

- Write down the three questions you most want answered
- Ask office staff to make copies of symptoms and questions and give to doctor
- Bring all medications currently being taken or
- Current list of all medications including over the counter ones like vitamins
- Set up and maintain an active medical file

### Playing an Active Role in Visits

- Allow the older adult to remain in control
- Permit physician and older adult to establish rapport
- State the main concern as written out
- Be open and honest
- Be succinct and to the point

#### Playing an Active Role in Visits (cont.)

- Ask for information about medications, treatments, tests
- Ask for clarification when you don't understand
- Request percentages for difficult options:
  "What is the likelihood that..."
- "What would you do if this was your mother?"
- Take notes during the visit

#### **Primary Care Physicians**

- Usually a family practitioner or internal medicine physician
- Main doctor coordinating all the person's care
- Coordinates all specialty visits
- Performs or refers for health maintenance procedures like immunizations, EKG's, mammograms, etc.

#### **Specialty Care Physicians**

- Are concerned with only one area such as heart, kidneys, lungs
- Do not get involved with ongoing care and maintenance
- Should report back to the primary care on results of tests and visits
- Generally can only answer questions regarding area of specialty

## Communicating with Physician's Office By Telephone

- Most physicians' offices now have automated answering systems
- Write down all the menu options as you hear them and save them
- Then you can press the numbers without having to listen to all the options each time
- Keep these menu options in your address book with the doctor's number
- When you first get to talk to someone identify yourself immediately by name and very briefly say what you need
- "This is Mrs. Smith, my father, Mr. Jones, is in Memorial Hospital and Dr. Green is taking care of him. May I speak with Dr. Green or his nurse about my father?"

## Communicating with Physician's Office by Telephone (cont.)

- If you need to leave a message, give several phone numbers where you can be reached and what times you will be there
- Leave directions for what information you would like, for example, the results of diagnostic tests or when is discharged planned
- In this way you are more likely to get the information you desire

## Communicating with Physician's Office by Fax

- Use this when unable to speak to someone
- Write down: your name, the patient's name, date of birth, the doctor who sees the person and briefly describe your issue
- Include where you can be reached and what questions you want answered

### Planning for a Surgical Admission

- Will have preparation
- Surgeon should have provided written materials
- Expect to hear from the anesthesiologist too
- Read all available materials
- Call numbers provided if you have questions

#### **Medical Admission**

- May not have preparation if emergency
- Have emergency packet ready to take at all times
- List of current meds, dosages, times of day, prescribing MD
- Copy of all insurance and Medicare cards
- Names and phone numbers of current physicians
- Power of Attorney for health care
- Names, addresses and phone numbers of next of kin

### **Medical Admission (cont)**

- Find out who the "admitting" doctor will be
- This person will control the whole admission may or may not be primary physician
- If the person goes to a specialty care unit, primary doctor may not be the admitting
- Be sure to find out who is "running the show"
- This person is the decision maker
- Be aware of all consults for specialty issues and direct your questions appropriately
- Find out when the "admitting doctor" makes rounds and make sure that some family member is waiting with a list of questions

### **Understanding How Medicare Pays for Hospitalizations**

- Medicare pays a hospital a lump sum of money for each hospital stay
- Same amount regardless of the number of days the person is in the hospital
- This lump sum is based on the diagnosis assigned to the patient when admitted
- This amount of money may be too little or it may be too much, but it is all the hospital receives
- Medicare also assigns a certain amount of time the individual is expected to stay in the hospital for this diagnosis
- Hospitals have an incentive to get people well and discharged as soon as possible

### **Summary of Communication Techniques**

- Have documentation ready for physicians
- Take notes yourself
- Be short, to the point and succinct
- Organize the information when talking with physician about a specific symptom
- Keep current emergency packet ready to go
- Maintain a medical file so you can keep things organized
- If family member lives alone, be sure emergency information is readily available
- in case ambulance comes without your knowledge
- Be sure primary MD has copy of advanced directives and healthcare power of attorney
- Fax succinct, well-organized note when calling is not good
- When calling MD offices with menu messaging systems, write the menu options down and save for future calls
- When you get someone on the phone, be short and succinct again