

## What to Consider When Arranging for a Visit to a Physician

As a caregiver, managing medical needs is an important role. It determines the quality of life both of the caregiver and the individual being cared for. Giving medication, providing special diets and monitoring for signs and symptoms that need attention is an integral part of ensuring optimal health given the challenges of the individual's illness. Effectively managing medical needs is largely determined by the relationship that you have with your physician. While the physician is available to give guidance, the onus is on the patient and the caregiver to articulate their needs by providing the physician with reliable information and actively participating in the care process. Therefore it is important to prepare for your office visit. Presenting yourself is not enough for you to receive optimal care. Here are some tips to ensure that you make the most of your visit.

- **Keep a symptom diary.** Between visits document any changes in functioning, mental, physical, or cognitive. Include time of day and length of time the symptom lasted. If you relate it to medication or food consumed and any other noteworthy event that you believe may have caused these changes, write it down. The day you are at the visit, chances are, all is well; and we tend to forget the myriad of events that occurred in between visits that are important to the physician completing a comprehensive assessment.
- **Develop a health resume.** This is particularly important when going to a new physician. Accuracy in reporting medical history is helpful to the physician and also makes it easier on the caregiver not having to try to recall events. Update as changes occur. Document diagnoses, surgeries, allergies, medications, hospitalizations with reason for event and other life changing events.
- **Take all medications and supplements with you.** Put all your pill bottles in a bag and take them with you to each physician, even if they were not the one to prescribe the medication. This is important to avoid drug to drug interactions and for the identification of supplements that may minimize the effectiveness of prescribed medications, or worsen some illnesses.
- **Laboratory results.** If this is a visit after recent lab work, get a copy prior to the visit. If this is not possible, request a copy at the visit for review with the physician. Identify lab values that are out of range and be prepared to ask; what it means, what aspect of the illness does it affect, and how it can be corrected.
- **New medications.** In addition to receiving the prescription, ask the physician to write down – why the medication was prescribed (diagnosis and reason), the medication dose, how and when it should be taken and possible side effects.
- **New diagnosis.** Ask the physician what symptoms can arise and how they should be managed in the home. Identify symptoms that should be escalated as a call to the physician or hospital / emergency room visit. If your primary care physician has made the diagnosis, find out what physician specialist manages this illness and follow up with them.
- **Complimentary services.** Find out if there are any other complimentary services that can be provided to help you as a care giver, while enhancing the wellbeing of the patient. Assistive devices, therapies, nutritional services, and community based support services all serve to better your living.