

COORDINATING DOCTOR'S CARE

Patients with perplexing and/or persistent health issues often enlist the help of multiple specialists. Some have the added frustration of conflicting opinions, repeated tests, treatment recommendations and a consistent diagnosis. Without the luxury of each specialist communicating with one another to coordinate the entire approach to patient care, ill patients are left to decide which doctor they feel is most confident in their diagnosis and treatment plan.

Ideally, doctors talk to one another. Why is this so daunting to coordinate? It shouldn't be, especially if there are clear discrepancies and confusion. If care between multiple specialists is sought under one roof - a large medical center, the coordination and communication is often automatic and immediate. Doctors in those settings frequently refer to one another and even require an introduction of the patient for a referral to be accepted. This type of setting is what many patients come to prefer. Many assume that if they seek advice from a doctor who cannot help them, he'll readily refer to another colleague.

For the patient making the trek on his own, a list of questions to pose to the doctor that may help guide the next steps, include:

- If you are unsure of a diagnosis or treatment plan, what type of specialist do you recommend and are you willing to communicate with this doctor?
- Can you contact physicians under whom you trained or mentored you? Who might he refer to?
- Can you consult with doctors of the same medical specialty who may have input for us?
- Who would **you** seek care with if this was **you** or **your child** with these symptoms?
- Are there any articles or resources you'd recommend to research for answers/treatment?

A patient seeking help should not feel this lineup of questions to be rude or intimidating to ask of the doctor. He is there to help and it should always be stressed that you appreciate him doing so, even if your care may surpass his area of familiarity. Further, presenting doctors with information and articles that may lead to further discussion has become the expected normal; many patients have become savvy with research and online resources. How did the doctor receive and review this information? Was it new to him? Was he in agreement? Is he willing to try something new?

A little preparation and a clear head prior to a doctor's appointment, especially when meeting with a doctor for the first time, always makes the meeting more productive. Some patients are pleasantly relieved that their doctor has come to appreciate well informed and proactive patients that are clearly taking charge of their health to the largest extent possible.

** Created by Julie Martinez, AGMD Pediatric Relations Representative*

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