

Sinclair Community College, Division of Allied Health Technologies

Health Promotion for Community Health Workers – Cardiovascular disease, stroke, and cancer

Class #13 Talking To Your Doctor

(date)

Course Objectives:

Show people how to take greater control over their health

Know how they can help people in the community living with heart disease or disability due to a stroke take care of themselves and prevent a second heart attack or second stroke.

Class/Learning Objectives: By the end of this session, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the patient's role and responsibilities as a member of the healthcare team.
2. Name three things a patient should do to prepare for a doctor's visit.
3. Name three questions a patient should ask during a visit to the doctor.
4. Be familiar with important information to have ready in case of emergency

Participants:

Instructor(s)

Students

Materials/Resources Needed:

Flipchart, markers, tape, blackboard, chalk and eraser

Handouts:

- 13-1 Health Diary
- 13-2 Questions to Ask
- 13-3 Emergency Info
- 13-4 Doctor Visit Preparation Checklist

Class Outline

I. Overview

II. Lesson

- A. Preparing for Your Visit
- B. During a Visit with the Doctor
- C. After a Visit with the Doctor
- D. Planning for an Emergency

II. Summary

III. Preview of next class

Plan for the Class:

I. Overview

In past years, most people considered their doctor to be “the boss” for issues concerning their health. You were expected to do what the doctor said – no questions asked.

But the role of the patient in health care has changed. Now, you are your doctor’s partner in health care. You may have more than one doctor and other health care professionals such as a therapist involved in your care; in this case, you are part of your health care team. As a partner in determining the success of your treatment, when visiting the doctor you should.

- Ask questions and take notes until you are certain you understand what the doctor is saying,
- Give complete and honest medical and lifestyle information to the doctor to help diagnose and treat health problems, and
- Stick to your health care plan and track your progress.

It’s not always easy, though, to take an active role in your treatment. Most doctors schedule appointments for only 10 to 15 minutes. With such a short amount of time, you may not feel comfortable taking the time to ask questions or you may feel rushed and can’t remember what you wanted to ask.

There is a way you can get the most out of each visit with your doctor. The key is to be thoroughly prepared for your appointment. You should begin preparing as soon as your appointment is made.

In this chapter we’ll talk about what you should do before, after, and during your appointment.

We’ll also talk about some things you should do, so you are prepared in case of emergency.

III. Lesson

A. Preparing for Your Visit

As a member of your own health care team being prepared for your visit with the doctor is very important, especially if it is the first time you’ve seen this particular doctor.

First, make sure your doctor’s office has a list of all the other doctor’s you see. Check with the office before your visit to see if they have the medical records from your other doctors.

Take a list of all your medicines and how often you take them. It may be easier to take all of your pill bottles and liquid medicines with you.

You should also have a record of information the doctor won't be able to find in your medical records, such as a description of any symptoms you have experienced and your recent health diary. We'll talk about the health diary a little later.

So you can follow the doctor's advice it's always a good idea to plan to take notes or record (on a tape recorder) your doctor's comments or bring a family member or friend that can take notes for you.

Let's talk about how to prepare for a doctor's visit in a little more detail.

Your doctor can better treat your illness if he or she has a complete picture of your overall health. That's why it's a good idea for your doctor to have a copy of all your medical records.

Medical Records

There are a few ways that your doctor can get your medical records from other doctors or health care centers.

- Your new doctor will request records from your other doctors or,
- If your primary doctor referred you to the doctor, he or she will send medical records to the new doctor or specialist,
- You can take a copy of your records yourself.

If you are seeing a new doctor or a specialist, when you make the appointment, ask if they will be requesting records from your other doctors. Make sure they know the names of all the doctors you are seeing.

You should know the doctor's complete name and where his or her office is located. If you plan to ask the doctor for a copy of your records to take to the appointment yourself, be sure to give the office staff enough time to get this done.

List all the doctors you are seeing

Even if your doctor receives medical records from all the doctors you are seeing, make a list of all the doctors you are currently seeing or have seen in the past five years to have available while taking to your doctor. In addition to the doctor's name, write down the type of doctor, such as heart doctor, allergy doctor, foot doctor, etc. Include when you last saw the doctor if you can remember.

Medicine

Put all of the medicine you are taking in a bag and take it with you to your appointment. Make sure you take the original medicine containers you got from the drug store. If this is not possible, make a list of all the medicines, how often you take it and how much you take. Taking

the pill bottles is probably a better idea, because you don't have to worry about making a mistake trying to write everything down.

Be sure to include all medicines or vitamins you take that a doctor did not prescribe for you. This includes cold and sinus medicine, vitamins, laxatives, pain pills, and diet supplements.

Record of symptoms

If you are seeing this doctor because you've not been feeling well, it is critical that your doctor understand exactly what the symptoms (what you feel) are, when they happen and how often. It can be harder than you think to try to remember these things once you are in the doctor's office, especially when the doctor has so little time.

The best way to make sure that your doctor understands how you feel is to write it down. Keep a record of anything that feels unusual, hurts, or is not normal for you or your body. Take time to think about how the pain feels. Is it a sharp pain that comes and goes or is it a constant, dull ache? Do you feel pain only when exercising or when resting also? Do you feel tired all the time or do you only begin to feel tired in the afternoon? Have you ever felt like this before?

You can keep track of how you feel as part of your overall health diary.

Health diary

If you are being treated for a health problem such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, congestive heart failure, or other illness, you should keep a health diary.

A health diary is a simple form you fill out each day that provides specific information on your health status for that particular day. Depending on your current health, you may need to track weight, blood pressure, blood sugar, physical activity or feelings such as pain, tiredness, nausea, numbness, and dizziness.

Handout 13-1: Health Diary

Review the health diary. Ask CHWs to think of and share ways they might encourage people in their community to keep a health diary.

Write down questions.

Take time to sit and think of questions you would like to ask your doctor. It might help to have a friend or relative do this with you. If you have more than a few questions, you may want to put them in order with the most important first. Refer to Handout 13-2 on sample questions to help you.

Handout 13-2: Questions to Ask

Review each question on the handout. Ask CHWs why a person might need that piece of information.

Notebook or tape recorder

It can be difficult to remember everything your doctor tells you during your visit. However, it is very important for your health that you follow your doctor's advice. To make sure you don't miss anything or forget what you've been told, take a notepad or a tape recorder with you.

If you take a tape recorder, be sure to practice taping before the appointment. Make sure the batteries are good and that you know how to turn the tape recorder on, how to put it on pause, and turn it off.

Ask someone to come with you

Asking someone to come with you can be a big help, especially if you live with the person or this person is involved in your healthcare. You could ask your husband or wife, son or daughter, or another close relative or friend.

Having another person with you is good for several reasons. First, it is often good to have someone there simply for moral support. Second, if the person takes part in your healthcare (even if it is to remind you to take your medicine), it is important that this person understand your doctor's instructions. And, third, an extra set of ears can help you with remembering what the doctor said.

If someone comes with you, let the doctor know before he or she gives you any instructions or information about your condition, you have someone in the waiting room who should hear everything you hear.

B. During a Visit with the Doctor

Now you are ready for your visit with the doctor. Your doctor has your medical records and you are prepared to:

- Ask questions and
- Write or record the answers.

Now, your doctor will be asking you questions and taking notes. Your job is to answer these questions as completely and honestly as possible.

Give complete information

Tell your doctor about aches and pains, and other feelings such as tiredness, dizziness, or nausea. You should also tell your doctor about feelings like feeling very sad for a long time or feeling very anxious or stressed out.

When your doctor asks you a question, try to give as much information as needed, but stick to the point. Say the things you think are most

important first. It will be much easier to give complete information if you use the health diary that we talked about earlier or write down your symptoms and when they happen.

Be honest

It is very important to be honest with your doctor. You should also be honest with your doctor about your lifestyle and habits. Be honest about how physically active you are each day, how much you smoke, and how much and what you eat.

You may want to ask your doctor a question that's a little embarrassing. Just remember, the doctor has probably heard it before. Doctors are used to discussing personal problems with their patients. The information you give your doctor is private.

Asking questions and being concerned about your symptoms is not a sign of weakness. Being honest about what you are feeling doesn't mean that you are complaining. The doctor needs to know how you feel.

Often doctors have written material or videos explaining your condition and treatment. If you feel you need more information, ask the doctor for something in writing or something you can watch on TV like a video tape.

C. After a Visit with the Doctor

It's important that you understand what your doctor has told you and that you can follow any advice or instructions he or she has given you.

Instructions

Follow the doctor's advice. However, if you find that you are unable to do so, you should call the doctor's office. For example, if it is such a problem for you to take a pill after lunch that you've missed that dose a number of times, you should call the doctor's office to find if there is another time you can take the medicine that will work as well and that will be better for you.

If you think of other questions about your treatment or realize you don't understand the doctor's instructions, call the doctor's office and ask. Usually, you will speak to your doctor's nurse.

You should write down the answers to these questions also.

D. Planning for an Emergency

As a partner in managing your health you need to be prepared in case of emergency. This is especially important if you are diagnosed with a disease or condition that could cause a heart attack or stroke.

The best thing to do is be ready for an emergency

Make a list of:

- Important telephone numbers such as your doctors, ambulance, fire department, and family members.
- List the phone numbers of the closest 24-hour drugstores.
- If you use electrical equipment that your health depends on, have the number of the power company in case your power goes out.

Nobody “plans” to have a heart attack or stroke. But just as people rehearse what to do in case of fire, you can prepare for a heart attack – yours or someone else’s.

Keep in mind, the time to prepare is before the life-threatening emergency. Then if something should happen, you can act quickly and calmly, and do the right things fast!

Handout 13-3: Emergency Info

Review each section of handout 13-3. Make sure the CHWs know what information should be in each section and why it is important in an emergency.

IV. Summary

Discussion: What can Community Health Workers Do to Help Prepare People for Medical Appointments?

Ask CHWs to share experiences they’ve had with doctors or with others who didn’t understand their doctors’ instructions. Ask the class to think of ways they can help community members feel comfortable talking to their doctors, and then ask them to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

What are the patient’s responsibilities as a member of the health care team?

What should a patient do to prepare for a doctor’s visit?

What should a patient ask during a visit to the doctor?

What information should you have ready in case of emergency?

Handout 13-4 Doctor Visit Preparation Checklist

Resources:

Talking with Your Doctor: A Guide for Older People. National Institute on Aging. National Institute of Health.

<http://www.niapublications.org/pubs/talking/talkwithdoc.pdf>

American Heart Association: www.americanheart.org

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Institute of Health;
Department of Health and Human Services. www.nhlbi.nih.gov