

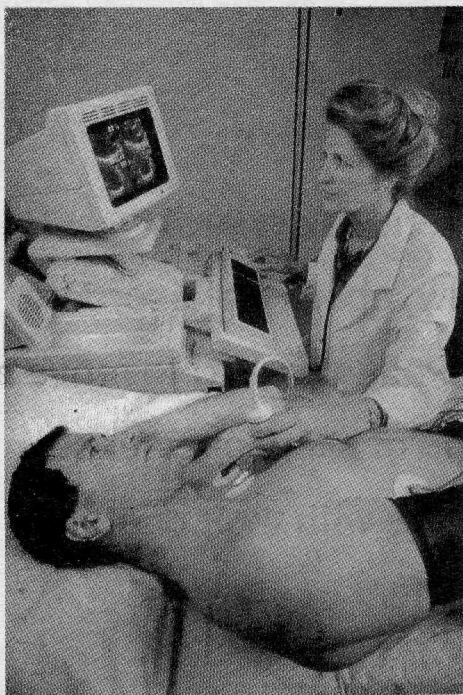
THE DOCTOR-PATIENT-PHARMACIST INTERACTION : CAN WE DO BETTER?

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Introduction

When a patient seeks treatment from a doctor the consultation usually ends in a prescription being given to the patient. This prescription has to be given to a pharmacist to get the medicines. As you can see when the patient gets his medicines three parties get involved, viz., the doctor, the patient and the pharmacist. It is important that there is proper communication amongst these parties to give maximum benefit to the patient.



When a patient consults the doctor, the doctor will be seeking information from the patient to arrive at a diagnosis. The process of diagnosis is important as the treatment which will be given to the patient will depend on the diagnosis. Each doctor has his or her own diagnostic approach to patients. Despite individual differences the diagnostic process involves

taking a history, performing a physical examination and doing investigations where appropriate. Sometimes adjectives are used to emphasise the importance of each of these areas (eg. careful or detailed history, thorough physical examination and relevant investigations). In some conditions the diagnosis is made predominantly on the history while in others the history is not so helpful and the examination gives vital clues to the diagnosis. In yet another patient the history and examination are not helpful while the investigations (blood and urine tests and X rays etc.) decide the diagnosis. As a patient you can help the doctor (and indirectly yourself) by being prepared for some potential questions and giving accurate answers. If you are not certain about some information it is better to say that. Also the option is there for you to check some records which you may be having at home but you do not have at the time of consultation.

Giving information to the doctor

The doctor will be asking about the past and present medical history, current symptoms and their progress, your smoking and drinking habits, vaccinations, operations, illnesses that run in families etc. If you have any diagnosis cards, vaccination cards you should show them to the doctor. You could tell the doctor about contact with any patient who has similar illness etc. (infectious diseases). In a case of fever, it is extremely important to remind the doctor of any visits to malarial areas. The potential questions that could be asked from you are enormous but the important point is to be prepared. Apart from the above you should remind the doctor about certain specific items of information which could affect your life.

Some of these include:

* All other drugs you are presently taking including eye drops, skin applications, indigestion pills etc. Some of the drugs the doctor may prescribe can interact with the medicines you are already taking and affect you adversely.

* Any allergies to medicines, foods or other substances; if you have any diagnosis cards which state about allergies please show them to the doctor. This is important as some allergic reactions can lead to serious consequences, including death.

* Unless the doctor has already asked the question, you should remind about any chronic illness you are having such as diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, rheumatic heart disease etc.



* If you are pregnant or have missed a period or plan to become pregnant or breast feeding please inform the doctor about it. This is because certain drugs should not be used during pregnancy and the doctor will avoid them if he is aware that you are pregnant. It is not uncommon to find pregnant women panicking about the drugs that had been given to them in early pregnancy, when they themselves were not sure whether they were pregnant. It is far better to avoid these circumstances by reminding the doctors.

There is responsibility on the part of the doctor to inquire about the above issues. However you should also take the initiative to remind the doctor since you could be the person that is affected. It is important that not only your regular doctor but all others who are treating you (eg. dentists, doctors in the accident department) are reminded about the issues discussed above.

Getting information from the doctor

Some doctors give a lot of information to the patients while others do not. From the patients point of view the most important method of getting information is by asking the doctor. Considering our culture some patient think that they would be offending the doctor by asking all these questions. It is far better to do the correct thing by asking the questions than to be doing the wrong thing without asking questions. The questions that can be asked from the doctor about your illness are many. In the following section some questions which you should ask about the drugs that you may be given to you are mentioned. Depending on the drug one or more of these items of information can be crucial.

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