



# Be Your Own Advocate

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

"Everybody has to be an official partner in our healthcare team nowadays," says RBOI social worker Wendy Hall, LCSW. Being proactive is central to that partnership. Several tools can help us advocate for our healthcare needs.

One such tool is a medication list, which includes dosages of both prescription and over-the-counter medications. "If you're on any supplements or tried any new vitamins, things that might have changed since your last visit," Hall says. Those changes could include medications one might not think about, like eye drops. "Some eye drops you might have for legitimate reasons may have steroids or cortisones in them, and that's important for the doctor to know about." Hall suggests keeping a journal or a notebook, "a ledger of everything."

Changes in life circumstances are also important to discuss. "For instance, if our spouse died and we're going through a grieving process, or something tragic happened to a family member," Hall explains. "There are also very sensitive things that we often avoid talking about with our physician." Those topics can include bowel movements and incontinence, sexuality, alcohol usage or drug (including pharmaceutical) overuse, smoking, fatigue, and memory problems. "Those things might be very relevant in our whole healthcare picture."

Hall recommends that we create a plan before seeing the doctor. "Oftentimes we're going to feel pressured and a little nervous, so the more things we have in our hand to go by, we won't have to remember every single thing that might be needed or asked. Make a list, a few days before your appointment,

and then double check and add to it if something else occurs to you. Have there been any hospitalizations or new illnesses that are relevant, or weight changes or appetite changes? Have you moved? Has there been any stress?"

Stress can include the effects, both direct and indirect, caused by COVID-19. "It might have led to a depression or an anxiety that is not who you normally would be," Hall says. "And that's something legitimate to talk about with your physician as well." Hall recommends that we prioritize our concerns, to make sure that the issues most important to us get discussed.

## Are We On the Same Page?

In addition to knowing what questions to ask, we need to make sure that we've heard the answers correctly. Don't be shy, Hall says. If a doctor is explaining a diagnosis and treatment or a nurse is giving instructions, it's okay to ask for clarification. "So, what I think you're saying is (fill in the blank). Did I get that right?"

Our understanding affects our treatment choices, Hall explains. "Pursue communication until we're all on the same page."

About  
**25%**

Amount of information given at a medical visit that patients accurately remember



More than  
**90%**

Patients with advanced cancer who say they want to be actively involved in their care



**1**  
out of  
**3**

Cancer patients who were not satisfied with how much they participated in making their treatment decision



More than  
**20 million**

Americans with children who start to feel stressed about the holiday season by the beginning of November (Total Brain survey, 2019)



## An Extra Pair of Ears

Medical appointments can be unnerving. A friend can lend support and can help absorb the information a healthcare worker provides. "If you can bring somebody with you, then do that," Hall says. "If you can't, you can always ask the doctor if you can tape the conversation." RBOI allows both options.

For more information, including more ways to be your own healthcare advocate, give us a call.

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