

Booth Gardner Parkinson's Care Center

Offering Comprehensive Movement Disorders Care

How Do I Make the Most of My Doctor Appointment?

~ Courtesy of Phil Ballard, MD ~

This is probably what you want from an appointment: ample time for a thorough history and examination; discussion of your disorder and alternative diagnoses; causes; your prognosis; treatment options; medications and their side effects, etc. Sound good? You bet!

Now how long do you think such an encounter would take? Probably a minimum of two hours! Unlike lawyers, physicians aren't paid by the hour. The squeeze between rising overhead and poor insurance reimbursements forces "efficiency." For most docs, that translates to more patients in less time. You don't like it; and believe me, the doctors don't like it. But that's the reality of medicine in the 21st century. You can do a lot to make this time well spent. Here are some suggestions:

Do a reality check on your expectations. All your questions are not going to be answered in one appointment, so do some prioritizing; select the two or three most important ones. Optimal treatment usually evolves over time, often with trial and error. Parkinson's and related disorders are just that way. See your physician as a consultant, and your treatment (which can indeed be very effective) as a collaboration.

Go prepared. Your medical history is the most important part of your evaluation. A good history gives critical information that will help separate Parkinson's from other disorders that can resemble Parkinson's, and it allows intelligent management of medications and other treatments. A rambling historical discussion argued between the patient and their spouse in front of the doctor is a nightmare. It's important to provide a concise overview of what you know about your condition and the other factors in your life that may affect it.

Your checklist for an initial consultation:

- I have reviewed and am able to present a chronological 'story' of my disorder.
- I have sent ahead of time copies of my medical records and any MRIs, etc.
- I have a list of any other serious illness, operations, or injuries I've had.
- I have a list of all the medications I take and when I take them.
- I am aware of any neurological disorders in my family.

Additionally, consider writing these things down as a synopsis, and for sure bring your spouse or important other. They often are aware of things that you aren't, and are another set of ears for what the doctor tells you.

Checklist for a follow-up visits:

Usually the focus is on what has happened to your symptoms since you were last seen, or what the affect of treatment has been.

- I have thought about changes in my symptoms, and what my major concerns are.
- I am prepared to report new health problems that have arisen.
- I can report the exact times I take my medications, when I start to experience an effect, and how long it lasts.
- I have done my homework, and know more about Parkinson's than I did earlier.

Do these things, and you've done your part to make your consultation productive and satisfying.

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