

Your Doctor Said

**WHAT?**

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*Exposing The Communication Gap*



Doctor-Patient Communication  
Doctor Shopping Type I

You may not know what “Doctor Shopping” is but I’ll bet you do it. There are actually two definitions.

The first type is when someone goes from one doctor to another trying to “find” a diagnosis he or she likes. That may sound pretty bizarre but it does happen. And worse yet, they never tell one doctor that they either have gone to another doctor or are going to go to one. They may end up with a myriad of tests AND medicines. From all the drugs, they may take some of this, some of that and never take them the way they’re supposed to. But this is a topic for another article.

The kind of patient I want to discuss today is the one who gets most of his or her advice outside of the doctor’s office. Let me give you an example. I stop at the gas station every morning to get my coffee. There’s a really great guy behind the counter and we’re always talking. One day I noticed that his wrist was very swollen so I asked about it. To make a long story short, I felt he probably had something like Rheumatoid Arthritis – a very nasty bone and joint condition. So, I advised him that he needed to see a doctor. He said that his ex-wife kept telling him that too. But that he wasn’t going to go – he was just going to see what happened.

Almost every time I’ve seen him after that he’s mentioned what someone else has told him. There was a drug salesman that mentioned he should try to get this type of drug. Then there was a chiropractor that told him he should be doing something with his feet (by that time, he’d developed swelling in his knee). His ex-wife gave him a different drug than what the salesman recommended. There was a physical therapist that told him he had gout. The last I heard someone told him he should have a cortisone shot. This person wasn’t even medical – it was just someone who had had one and therefore felt that he should get one in his knee. By this time, I just cringe when I walk in and don’t even ask him if he’s been to the doctor yet because I’m afraid to hear the answer.

This is so dangerous. People are always willing to give you advice about anything- you already know that about other aspects of your life. There’s no difference with medical issues. Everyone’s had something wrong with them and if you give them a chance, they will find some similarity between their condition and yours. And therefore, to them, the thing you SHOULD do is whatever they did to get better – it may be going to a massage therapist or taking their grandmother’s chicken noodle soup with herbs in it. Don’t get me wrong - I am not saying that some of these things don’t work (I’m a big advocate of

home remedies but when things are still just as bad as they were a few weeks ago, that ought to tell you something).

You really need to go to a doctor when there are things bothering you that are chronic conditions. You can try other remedies that people tell you about but if you go back to the previous paragraphs, this man was getting actual MEDICAL ADVICE from these people – which drug he should get, a cortisone shot should be used, etc. These are not home remedies. He was given a drug (and it was a potent one) by someone without having a diagnosis. This drug could have caused bleeding from his stomach or intestines (common side effect).

Avoiding seeking care is bad enough in my book but I understand that not everyone has insurance and can't just go to the doctor right away when things bother them. However, please don't be taking things that other people say (or give you) as the correct thing to do or use. Not only will they not always work, they may create more problems as we just discussed. And, it creates pre-judgment in your mind so that if the doctor (when you finally go see one) cannot "win" unless his diagnosis matches one of your friends, acquaintances or customers.

Researching on the internet is better than this because the internet gives you possible options based on all the symptoms you put in. Plus, you can get verification on many websites.

So, do yourself a favor, listen to what people tell you and thank them politely for their advice and then go to the phone and make the appointment with your doctor.

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Dr. Wurzbacher is a retired Navy Emergency Medicine Physician who recognized about early in her career that she wasn't good at communication and more importantly that she was probably missing much of what her patients were trying to tell her. Although she was excellent at diagnosing conditions, patients generally need more than that. The Emergency Department is one (of many) places that being good at communication is essential since you have no records to work with and a short amount of time to glean information and make a diagnosis. So, she worked diligently at learning to really HEAR what her patients were telling her. Teaching young doctors and ancillary staff the personal aspects of medicine has become a passion of hers. Her book, *"Your Doctor Said What"* is intended to help patients not only understand why many doctors seem like aliens but also how to empower themselves to deal with them.

Check her out at <http://www.yourdoctorsaidwhat.com> and <http://www.yourdoctorsaidwhatblog.com> .