

Your Doctor Said

WHAT?

Dr. Terrie Wurzbacher

Exposing The Communication Gap



Doctor-Patient Communication
“Making a List, Checking It Twice!”

Dr. Terrie Wurzbacher

No, we’re not talking about Santa Claus, we’re talking about you and your doctor’s appointment. Making lists is the most important activity you can perform BEFORE you go to your appointment.

You know from experience that you don’t remember everything you wished you remembered when you get there (or when you get done and are on the way out). There’s always variables that throw you off guard and if you were on a roll, you suddenly get derailed.

So, how can you prevent this? By making lists, that’s how. Oh, and then, of course, you have to remember to take the lists with you to the appointment. Not surprisingly, though, if you forget to take them, you’ll still be better prepared if you’ve written out the lists.

Bring the symptom diary you’ve been compiling since you realized these symptoms weren’t going to go away. Or, if you have a chronic condition, the diary of triggers and conditions of the problem.

Make a list of the questions you have or will have. Get your spouse to participate in this because you know they always have questions too – and frequently they are able to come up with questions you have not even considered. These questions are not just about what’s wrong with you, but also about what tests need to be done and when; what activities you might be restricted from (and why); what should you do about work; what treatments is the doctor going to give you; how and when to contact the doctor or the office after you leave; and anything else that comes to mind.

Write it down!

You should also make some lists and carry them with you at all times. This includes a list of medicines you take. List any over the counter or herbal medicines you use/take. These medicines may impact any other medicines or treatment you might get. It’s a good idea to write your list in pencil so you can change it as needed (or do it on the computer where you can easily change it too, but pencil is the easiest). Put this list in your wallet and carry it with you.

You need another list (maybe on the back of your medication list) that lists your medical problems. Make sure to keep this up to date. This will help when you're at the doctor's office but will also help if you ever have to be taken to the emergency department or are unconscious. You want the medical folks taking care of you to be able to figure out what your existing problems are. Medic Alert[®] has created a great product which is a USB drive that fits on your key ring and has all your medical problems, medicines, and emergency information on this drive. Your list can also contain a list of procedures and surgeries you've had although this is not necessary. It's just that the more information available to the medical people, the better.

List things you want to mention to the doctor. This is other than the symptom diary. You may want to ask for samples or generics. Write it down! You may want to ask how to contact the doctor afterwards. Write it down! You may need to know what to do about insurance papers. Write it down!

If you think it, write it!

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> .