

Who Is Your Doctor and Why?*

Forrest Beck, N.D.

Take a minute and ponder the above question. If you are more critical of the latest restaurant you have eaten at or movie you have seen than you are of the doctor you choose, then this article is written for you. There are many ways to choose a doctor or healthcare provider. For some it is a matter of which doctor accepts their medical insurance. For others it may have to do with a referral made by a friend or perhaps a certain specialist required. Regardless of the case, it is my intention to discuss some points I believe are useful in selecting a partner in your medical care, be it a chiropractor, an acupuncturist, a physical therapist, or a primary care physician.

One of the most important decisions to be made is whether you hope to become more or less dependent over the years on pharmaceutical drugs to manage your health condition? Automatically, one is able to eliminate certain medical doctors or perhaps naturopathic doctors who have a reputation for prescribing drugs or supplements at the drop of a hat, rather than taking a more conservative approach suggesting dietary intervention or lifestyle changes, if applicable. There are certainly people out there who are perfectly happy taking a pill and not giving a second thought to why they are doing it, let alone if there exists a different way of treating their disease altogether. This, of course, is a choice only you can make as a patient.

However, I am finding just the opposite trend in my practice. In particular, a growing segment of the population, led principally by the baby boomers, is seeking care in hope of weaning off or reducing the total number of medications taken. With many approaching retirement age, baby boomers want to enjoy the fruits of their labor, traveling the globe or taking up hobbies, rather than being bogged down by side effects from medications. A growing number refuse to be led down the same path their parents took, not

questioning treatment choices of their doctors and suffering a premature demise as a result of unwarranted surgeries or interactions from multiple medications.

With that in mind, it is essential to ask yourself if your doctor is a partner or impediment in that process. Are you being urged to go on the latest cholesterol lowering drug or to have back surgery without even having seen a chiropractor for a second opinion? In addition, how much time do you spend at each visit with your doctor? Granted, time is not always a reflection of the quality of service received. But, in order for effective communication to take place a certain amount of time is necessary, usually greater than a few minutes. For example, do you leave the appointment feeling as though you had enough time to discuss each of your health concerns? Were your questions answered completely or dismissed? Did you or will you receive answers to all of your questions? A doctor may not know the answers to every question, but should acknowledge your inquiry and get back to you within a few days. Moreover, do you feel rushed by your doctor and is he able to focus on you during the appointment? How well does your doctor listen? Does she initially establish or maintain eye contact with you? These may seem like insignificant points, but they really do make a difference.

A big part of what any good doctor or health care provider offers is education. And tailoring that education to the individual is crucial. A goal I have with my patients is to encourage them to become more self-aware and responsible for their own health care decisions. This does not mean I am not there for my patients offering treatment options, guidance, and support. However, if I sense a patient is unwilling to make any lifestyle modifications or just wants a quick-fix, then I refer them to a doctor better suited for that task. From my perspective, good health is analogous to a financial investment. Both require continued due diligence, building of resources, assessing risk tolerance, ample time and patience, and of course a willingness to be flexible and learn what works for you.

Ultimately these are the health decisions that you are responsible for making. No health care provider can achieve your goals for you, it is a mutual agreement that both parties must work towards. Do not let the fact that your insurance provider does not cover the cost of a doctor you know you need to see keep you from taking the next step in achieving your health goals. Ask yourself what sort of relationship you have with your doctor and what you gain from it. Hopefully, you have found a practitioner you are comfortable with, or perhaps a partnership among a group of healthcare providers that best meets your needs. Whatever the case may be, I hope you keep in mind some of the questions I raise above and place them in context of your own life. After all, without good health our lives are not as rich as they could be, nor are our goals as attainable.

* The above title is borrowed from a wonderful book written by a medical doctor in 1958 named Alonzo Shadman. Well worth the read!