

Tips for Communicating With Your Health Care Team

The main ingredient in any successful partnership is communication. And the same holds true when it comes to your relationship with your Parkinson's care team. Miscommunication brings on stress, and stress accentuates the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, says care expert Ruth Hagestuen, RN, MA, who is the Director of NPF's signature program for healthcare professionals, Allied Team Training for Parkinson (ATTP). She offers the following five suggestions for establishing clear communication with key members of your care team.

- ✓ **Plan ahead.** Go to your doctor's appointment prepared. Bring a list of your medications and dosages with you to every visit. Be sure to include medications for all conditions, as well as supplements.
- ✓ **Be specific.** When you arrive at your appointment, tell your doctor (and nurse) why you're there and what's bothering you most. "Be very clear about your priorities and the problems you are facing," Hagestuen said. Write down the facts behind your health concerns beforehand, but leave the detailed diary at home. "You should have a couple questions to bring forward so you can get the most important issues addressed first."
- ✓ **Speak up.** Ask for explanations for medical terms you don't understand. Point out information about your symptoms that worry you. Ask for details about a recommended prescription or medication change that you don't fully understand. "Speak up if a suggestion doesn't feel like something you would be willing to do," Hagestuen said. "You really need to be direct and negotiate what will work for you."
- ✓ **Ask for what you need.** Ask your doctor for a referral to a professional who can offer appropriate support. That may be a rehabilitation specialist, a mental health

counselor or a social worker. Find out about classes, wellness programs and support groups in your area.

- ✓ **Be Aware in Care.** Get the *Aware in Care* kit, which is available free of charge by calling NPF's Helpline 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636) or visit www.awareincare.org. As you'll see, the kit provides information and tools to help guide conversations between you and your health care team before, during and after a hospital visit.

FACEBOOK FAN REACTIONS TO THE AWARE IN CARE CAMPAIGN

"I ordered and received it promptly and used it during a recent ER visit. It's very useful and made registration much easier. Every patient should have one."

Mary R., Jersey City, NJ

"These kits will continuously improve quality of care of patients and family members—from admission to discharge."

Ron V., Miami, FL

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TOP QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

Why is this medication being prescribed/What symptoms signal a problem and how should I respond? You want to make sure you have a complete understanding of your medication regimen, including potential drug interactions and side effects.

How will you monitor my Parkinson's treatment/Who will coordinate my care? Find out who your main contact is, when you should return for your next visit and how frequently your medication schedule will be evaluated and adjusted.

What hospital should I go to in an emergency? People living with Parkinson's have higher hospitalization rates. Discuss the "what if" scenarios with your doctor. Tell your doctor about NPF's *Aware in Care* kit.

For a complete list of questions to print out and take with you, visit www.parkinson.org/questions.