



# Working Effectively With Doctors

Presented by Wendy Ringer  
Family to Family Health Information Center - PACER Center  
September 23, 2010

# Goals

---

- To provide tips and tools for creating positive working relationships between families and doctors and improve health outcomes for individuals with special health care needs by:
  - Promoting collaboration on the health care team
  - Improving communication
  - Developing health care plans
  - Maintaining personal medical records

# The Health Care Team

---

The health care team may include a number of health care professionals, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, therapists and always the individual with special health care needs and their family.

# The Health Care Team

---

You have expertise about your child's or your own health care that no one else has, and you should be an equal member of the health care team.

# How to be an effective and collaborative team member

---

- Express your needs and opinions clearly and directly
- Be well informed, calm, prepared and persistent
- Set reasonable goals – stick to one issue at a time
- Ask for clarification when you don't understand

# There may be times you disagree

---

- You can disagree without being disagreeable or angry
- Express your own feelings without blaming others. Use “I” messages, rather than “you” messages.
- Think about where you might be willing to compromise.

# Goals of Good Communication

---

- Positive, respectful, and trusting relationship
- Satisfaction with health care
- Good health outcomes

# Keep in Mind

---

- Remain realistic about what you can expect of your doctors, one doctor cannot solve all the problems or answer all of your questions
- As part of the health care team you have a responsibility for good communication, follow up, and keeping good records
- Doctors are human and, like you, may at times be frustrated with a lack of answers about what is happening.

# Before Your Doctor Appointment

---

- Get a long enough appointment
- Keep a journal or log about health or related issues
- Write down questions
- Prepare your child
  - Tell the child what to expect, who you will be seeing and why, what tests may be done, encourage the child to think of at least one question to ask the doctor.

# During the Appointment

---

- Listen and take notes
- Repeat back to the doctor your understanding of what has been discussed
- Develop a written plan
- Plan for follow-up
- Ask questions:
  - What else should we be doing or consider?
  - Are we covering all the bases?
  - Are there other doctors who should be involved?

# During the Appointment

---

- If the doctor does not have time to answer all your questions or needs time to look into the matter, give the doctor a written list of questions and ask that he or she call you back or set up a time to follow-up
- If you anticipate a major discussion, diagnosis, or treatment plan at the appointment, consider taking a trusted friend or family member with you

# Developing a Health Care Plan

---

- Develop a plan based on what is applicable for you or your child
- Decide with the doctor how often the plan needs to be updated
- Use this as a communication tool with other doctors or health team members
- Bring the plan with you to all appointments, keep it on a computer if possible

# Health Plan Summary based on diagnosis or body systems

---

Name/Address/Phone/ Date of last revision

Explain/describe diagnosis

- Describe current status or changes
- Doctors involved/last appointment
- Recommendations from last appointment/next appointment needed/ referral needed?
- Current medications
- Tests needed or follow-up on recent tests
- Other issues
- Follow-up required/date of next up-date

# Is there a need for an Emergency Information Form?

---

- An EIF contains additional information in a shortened format
  - Typical protocols for child/adult
  - Procedures to be avoided
  - Signed by physician
- Form developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and The College of Emergency Physicians accessible at:

<http://www.pacer.org/health/blankform.pdf>

# Medical Records

---

- Why do you want them?
  - Review for accuracy
  - Gain more knowledge about diagnosis
  - Resource for questions about diagnosis
  - Information in an emergency: records may be in multiple locations where care is received, you may have most complete record
  - Communication with specialists
  - Filing appeals or applying for public programs
  - Historical record of changes/improvements/trends

# It's the Law

---

- You have a right to copies of your own/your child's medical records
- Submit a written request to provider
- Provider should give you records "promptly"
- You may have to pay a fee, unless you are requesting the records to review "current medical care"
- Or, talk with you child's/your doctor about your desire to get copies
  - ask for copies at office visits or ask them to be mailed to you

# Ideas for Organizing Medical Records

---

- Use a three-ring binder and divide into sections such as:
  - Current care plan
  - Providers names, address, phone
  - Health history
  - Current and past medications
  - Appointment and telephone logs
  - Lab reports
  - X-ray reports
  - Hospital summaries
  - Education plans
  - Insurance information

# Consider Web-based Systems

---

- Children's Hospitals and Clinics, Children's Medical Organizer:

<https://www.childrenshc.org/cmo/>

- Sample personal medical record keeping forms can be found at:

[http://www.medicalhomeinfo.org/for\\_families/care\\_notebook/](http://www.medicalhomeinfo.org/for_families/care_notebook/)

# Keep Your Own Notes

---

- Keep a written call log for anyone you speak to on the phone, this can provide documentation about your concerns/actions
  - Date and time of call, name and title of person you spoke with, phone number, reason for call, information received, outcome/follow-up
- Record notes about changes or concerns about your child's/your condition
  - Temperatures, eating and sleeping issues, medication reactions, changes in behavior

# Have a Primary Doctor

---

- Medical Home
- Should be helpful in coordinating and communicating when multiple doctors or issues are involved, (hospitalizations, emergency care, health plans)
- Should address other health issues and look at the needs of you as a whole person
- Should know you well and have a trusting relationship with you
- For more information on Medical Home:  
<http://www.pacer.org/health/medicalhome.asp>

# Teach Children to Be Self-Advocates

---

- Start early
  - Give them choice when there is choice
  - Encourage them to answer and ask questions, ask doctor to make time for this
  - Teach them about their diagnosis
  - For young children it may help to have a doll

# Teach Children to Be Self-Advocates

---

- Gradually teach them and give them responsibility for health care procedures and routines
- Making doctor appointments, ordering medications/supplies
- For older children/teenagers, ask doctor for different ways to communicate directly with them such as e-mail

# Communicate with School

---

- Communicate effectively with school nurse and other school staff, have a school health plan
  - examples can be found at:  
<http://www.pacer.org/health/samplehealthplans.asp>
- Ask doctor to help with school issues, explaining diagnosis, health needs and accommodations in school
  - Letter to school
  - Attend or participate in IEP/504 meeting

# Other Considerations

---

- You can change doctors if it just isn't working
- Working with Doctors booklet offers suggestions for interviewing and questions to ask

# Conclusion

---

- The health system is complex, and working with multiple health professionals can be intimidating and sometimes frustrating. Yet, these are important relationships because we need good health care, and we all need the expertise of physicians and other health professionals
- You can model good communication for your doctor, they can learn from you

# Questions??????

---

Contact Information:

Wendy Ringer

F2F HIC Coordinator

PACER Center

952-838-9000

[wendy.ringer@pacer.org](mailto:wendy.ringer@pacer.org)