

# **Questions Are the Answer**

**Jane Kapustin, Nurse Practitioner**

I find in my practice patients initially are reluctant to ask questions.

**Christina Cyphers, Patient**

A lot of us just go to our doctors and, "Well tell me what's wrong, give me a pill, and help me feel better."

**Douglas Smith, Patient**

I don't think that people my age are very comfortable with asking questions.

**Lauri Diener, Patient**

Often when you get in front of your doctor, you forget what you wanted to say.

**Jane Kapustin, Nurse Practitioner**

You get nervous, you get a little anxious.

**Ramona Seidel, MD**

There's this notion that the physician doesn't want to be challenged.

**Jane Kapustin, Nurse Practitioner**

I've often heard patients say, "You know, I don't want to keep bothering you. I have another question, but I think I've taken too much of your time."

**Ashesh Patel, MD, Intern**

They don't ask a whole lot, they're just like, "Okay, whatever you want to do is fine with me."

**Bill Lee, Patient**

He's the doctor, who am I to ask him a question?

**Molly Classman, Patient**

They know what they're talking about. Why should I, you know, even question what they're doing?

I don't want to make them feel like I'm second-guessing them. But you have to.

**Rachelle Toman, MD**

If you're willing to ask your hairstylist a question or your grocery store clerk a question, ask your doctor a question!

**Narrator**

Research shows that the more effectively doctors and patients communicate, the better patients' health outcomes will be. So as you're waiting for your medical appointment, take a moment to listen to the voices of clinicians and patients like you talking about the importance of asking questions.

**Bill Lee, Patient**

I think that if I had not started to ask questions of my doctors, I honestly think I'd be dead today.

I've got coronary artery disease, I've had ten heart attacks, and I'm a diabetic. Early on in my condition, I would go in and see my doctor and he would tell me, "Oh you've got this, and you've got that." He'd say, "Here, take this prescription, go get it filled." I'd go home and my wife would be like, "What's this for?" "I don't know. Doctor said to take it."

**Jane Kapustin, Nurse Practitioner**

It's been proven over and over again with research that patient outcomes are improved with good communication.

Not too long ago, a patient asked me a question about a medication. I quickly could see that she was on two medications that were the same, just different names.

**Rachelle Toman, MD**

Patients who ask me questions give me great insight into where they're coming from. It helps me know what their fears are, what their concerns are, what they're struggling with at home.

**Douglas Smith, Patient**

I try to make a list of things that I want to remember to ask about or talk about.

**Ramona Seidel, MD**

If the patient leaves my office and they have questions about what the plan is, they're not very likely to do the plan! And they may not do anything because they feel so unsure that they're afraid they may make a mistake and make things worse.

**Narrator**

You may have brought a list of questions with you. If not, look for this pad provided by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and write down your top three questions you want to make sure to discuss with your clinician.

**Jane Kapustin, Nurse Practitioner**

I feel much better about the fact that a patient will stop me and say, "You know, I have a question about that."

**Laurri Diener, Patient**

Why am I waking up at night with these chest pains?

**Alastair McGregor, Patient**

I hear that there is this other medication. Do you think that it might be a good idea trying it?

**Christina Cyphers, Patient**

Will it be okay for me to take that?

**Bill Lee, Patient**

Will it interfere with this medication?

**Molly Classman, Patient**

What anti-anxiety drug is mom supposed to be getting now?

**Douglas Smith, Patient**

How many pills should I take?

**Ramona Seidel, MD**

Two pills once a day or one pill twice a day?

**Laurri Diener, Patient**

My doctor listened to me. She had me start talking, and I think that's how she figured out so quickly what was wrong with me, because she just asked me to start talking.

**Linda Bradley-Tiernan, MD, Pediatric Cardiologist**

I encourage my patients to do research and come prepared to an appointment in the same way that they might come prepared to a business meeting, or to a conference with a teacher, because it's of equal importance.

### **Christina Cyphers, Patient**

At first I felt a little nervous questioning my doctor about my own findings of what I had found online and what I had researched in books, but after I got past that fear and asked that question, she was like, "Well, I'm glad you asked that question."

### **Linda Bradley-Tiernan, MD, Pediatric Cardiologist**

I have a wonderful doctor. I come with my little list of questions, and I'm a doctor.

### **Carolyn Clancy, MD**

Sometimes people will come in with a lot more questions than there's going to be time for that day. That's okay. You don't have to get them all answered in one day. And in fact, as you're making a list and thinking about issues that are important to you, it's actually a really great idea to tick off or make a little star next to those issues that are most important right now.

### **Rachelle Toman, MD**

You don't want to get to the end of the appointment and be thinking, "Oh, that's the one thing I wished I had asked, and we didn't get to it."

### **Narrator**

While you're meeting with your doctor, keep in mind it's not enough to ask questions. You also need to make sure you understand the answers.

### **Carolyn Clancy, MD**

Communication is a two-way street. Sometimes Starbucks does a better job at this than we do in health care. You know, you order a drink, they repeat it back, they tell their colleague, they write it on the cup. It's kind of built-in error prevention.

### **Bill Lee, Patient**

I make sure that they hear my questions, and that I hear their answers. If they say something to me that I don't understand, I'll ask them, "Could you please explain that again? Is this what you're trying to tell me?" And let them explain it to you in layman terms, and until you got it.

### **Narrator**

The next time you're near a computer, go to [www.ahrq.gov/questions](http://www.ahrq.gov/questions) for more tips and tools to help improve communication with your health care provider before, during, and after your medical appointments. For your free copy of the brochure, "Be More Involved in Your Health Care: Tips for Patients," call 1-800-358-9295.

### **Ashesh Patel, MD, Intern**

The best way for a doctor/patient relationship to be successful is for a partnership to exist. You want to be doing the best for them. They want to do the best for themselves. You ask them questions, they ask you questions.

### **Bill Lee, Patient**

It's a two-way street, and you cannot be afraid to talk to your doctor.

### **Jane Kapustin, Nurse Practitioner**

It's a partnership of communication, and it is vital.

### **Bill Lee, Patient**

I feel better today than I ever have.

**Laurri Diener, Patient**

I think I've become more committed to asking questions and not being afraid to ask questions.

I feel like that's my right, to feel good!

**Christina Cyphers, Patient**

The lesson I learned is be proactive for yourself. You know, taking your health into your own hands, being your own advocate. Now I walk in, I'm like, "Oh yeah, I've got a lot of questions for you!"

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