

A.S.K. for health information

By Suze Hargraves

If you've got a chronic condition or disease it's easy to become frightened or misinformed in your search for answers. The national news media uses scare tactics to get your attention and then gives nothing more than 30 second sound bites of information. The internet provides endless sources of information, but it is often poorly researched, biased or worse-an advertisement for something disguised as health information. How is a person supposed to get good information to help them make good choices under these confusing conditions? It's really very simple: **A.S.K.**

Answers: Talk to your healthcare provider about your condition. Don't be afraid to ask questions you may think are "silly". There are no stupid questions. Get answers. Write them down so you can refer to your notes any time you need information or even just reassurance. Ask your provider for other sources of information about your condition. Is there a particular website they recommend for you? Is there a book they feel is appropriate? Start with the source you trust your life to-your healthcare provider.

Search: Go ahead and search the internet. Everyone does it even when they're told not to. You, however, will not go into cyberspace as a gullible novice. During your search you are going to take every single thing you see or read with a grain of salt. Believe nothing unless it comes from the website recommended to you by your provider. Take every piece of information you find interesting, scary or relevant and print it out or write it down. Use this information to form the list of things to discuss during your next office visit. (If you have a lot of information to review with your provider don't forget to mention this when scheduling your appointment to allow appropriate time.) Please don't believe everything you find online. Cyberspace is full of quacks and devious sales tactics disguised as medical information. Nothing replaces the guidance of your healthcare provider.

Knowledge: Build yourself a knowledge base that is founded in information verified by and advice from your healthcare team. Gather and use all you can about local support groups and resources. Get a binder and keep all your notes and information in one handy place. Keep bills for tests and visits as well as insurance paperwork in your binder too. Your binder will help you and your family when questions arise about your condition or appropriate care.

Having a health problem of any kind can be scary. Knowing how to get reliable information and use it properly is imperative. By using the three simple facets of A.S.K. you can be sure you've got good information to help you make informed, intelligent choices in partnership with your healthcare team. Being a cooperative or "good" patient is not the same as being a passive patient. You have to be an active participant in your own care.

Good patients always ask.

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