



Be Your Own Health Care Professional

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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I grew up in an age when rural Saskatchewan doctors made house calls. They also did hospital rounds and ran a clinic. They usually knew their patients well because they delivered many of them. Lab work and x-rays were done in one location - at the local hospital. Specialists were almost unheard of and that meant that the local doctor needed to deal with pretty well everything.

Things have changed so much! Now clinics have huge waiting lists of people who do not have a family physician. Those who are ill and do not have a family physician often end up seeing a walk-in doctor who merely deals with the presenting surface issue without all the medical history. Some end up waiting for hours at a time in a triage system at the local Emergency ward.

Because of specialization, the doctor who, in the past, would have been the "expert" now plays a role similar to the quarterback on a football team. S/he does an intake meeting and then sends out appropriate referrals to other professionals who diagnose and treat.

Well, no matter who you see or what your situation is, you are the one who actually understands your body and mind the best. Because of this, it is important that you do some things to ensure that you obtain and maintain a healthy condition:

1. Keep good records - Start a book or electronic site where you record information. Before you go to see a physician or health professional, write down all the concerning symptoms as well as your questions. Make sure that your book has a list of the medications that you are taking. Your pharmacist will provide a copy for you. During or immediately after your appointment you can write down new information that your physician has provided you. Keeping track of all your appointments and health concerns in this book will help you to keep accurate information without having to try to remember things. A secure clip on the front of your book will allow you to safely hold new prescription requisitions or other handouts received during appointments.

2. Watch for change - Are you losing or gaining weight? Do you sleep less or more than usual? Has your mood been different? When did you first start experiencing new pain or notice unfamiliar bumps and bruises? On a scale of one to ten, (with one being the worst and ten being the best situation), how do you rate the seriousness of your problem? Make written notes about these things in your book.

3. Do your research - Not everything on the internet is accurate and experience that your friends might tell you about may not apply to you. At the same time, however, there are ways that you can learn about your diagnosis or if there are treatment options available for you to try. The library, computer and acquaintances are all good sources for learning about health, illness and treatment.

4. Be wise - Ensuring that you eat a nutritious diet and get enough rest are the foundation of good health care practice. Limit your alcohol and caffeine consumption as well as your stress. Exercise find positive ways to contribute to society and laugh!

5. Be a good advocate for you - If your physician promised to do something and you aren't sure if it was done, call his/her office to find out. Remember, physicians are extremely busy. It is up to you to follow up if you haven't heard by the date given. I see many clients who wait for information thinking that "someone" will call them and "someone" never calls. Be pro-active. Also, be willing to ask if there is a cancellation list that you can be on if your next appointment is far down the road. If you have trouble understanding or remembering details, ask a friend or family member to attend your appointment with you and make notes. You are in the "business" of health care.

Your physician has only a few short minutes to meet with you. During that time s/he needs to gather information, determine a diagnosis and then recommend treatment. On the other hand, you have twenty-four hours a day on every single day of the year to take care of yourself, record information and make good health care choices.

In today's busy world it is more of a responsibility than ever for you to take responsibility to be well and stay well!