

# Helping patients help themselves

## *coming prepared to medical appointments*

—submitted by the PCS Patient Education Committee

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**S**ome patients get nervous before going to a doctor's appointment. There's actually a name for this anxiety; it's called, 'white-coat syndrome.' But patients can ease their nerves by preparing ahead for appointments. Time spent with caregivers can go by quickly; preparing ahead allows patients to make the best use of that time by knowing what they want to discuss and having questions ready for their nurse, doctor, therapist, or other caregivers. All members of the healthcare team want appointments to be comfortable and relaxed so they can effectively address any issues and help promote good health.

Preparing for an appointment can be as simple as calling ahead or remembering to bring certain information or materials.

### *Calling ahead:*

- If a patient has a disability that requires special accommodations or assistance, they should call the office before their appointment so staff can plan accordingly. This ensures a comfortable, safe, timely visit
- If English is not the patient's primary language and/or assistance is needed to communicate with the care team, they should call the office before their appointment so staff can request an interpreter or put in place any other interventions to ensure effective communication

### *What to bring:*

- A current list of all medications including over-the-counter (no prescription) medications, herbal medications, dietary supplements, and alternative medicines

- Pharmacists should be able to print and/or e-mail a list of all current prescribed medications, which patients can access on electronic devices, such as cell phones or tablets. Having prescriptions filled at one pharmacy is a good safety measure as it allows the pharmacist to cross-check medications for potentially adverse interactions or side-effects
- Health history and family health history
- List of allergies: food, drug, environmental, etc.
- Contact information for other healthcare providers
- List of questions for the care team. Questions can be written out on paper or electronic devices, such as cell phones. Writing down the answers and keeping any information given by the team is also a good idea as patients can refer to it at home
- Emergency contact information
- Discharge documents from recent hospitalizations
- A family member or friend, if needed, to hear information provided by caregivers

Preparing for medical appointments is helpful for both the patient and the care team. Face-to-face meetings are a great time to ask questions or voice concerns about side-effects or symptoms. Patients and caregivers should take advantage of these opportunities to engage in conversations about relevant health issues. Preparing questions in advance is a way to ensure that all concerns are addressed, and that patients get the information they need. The best way for patients to help themselves is to come prepared to medical appointments so caregivers can provide the best care possible.

For more information, call any member of the PCS Patient Education Committee.