Tips for Doctors

Advice from one health care provider to another

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Never assume you know the answer.

“Ask your patients questions and listen to the answers—and then ask more questions,” says Cafaro. “If the patient really needs to talk in-depth and you’re pressed for time, schedule another visit with them to focus on that issue alone.”

Explain your reasoning.

Don’t assume the patient understands your choices. “When my patients want an MRI to see if they have brain damage because they’re having some minor memory problems, I have to remind them that there’s a downside: radiation,” says Cafaro. “Maybe they’re just a little depressed. But I’ll usually OK a low-risk screen for something if it’ll end their anxiety. You have to talk these things out.”

Ask your patients what their priorities are.

“Get to know what’s important to them to better care for them,” says Gathe. “Even if you’re rushed, give them the time they need to explain their concerns. And use language they can understand. I try to use the King’s English, Ebonics and millennial slang, though the latter is clearly a work in progress!”

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