

## Medical Empowerment

How do you become an empowered health care consumer? A recent blog post on the Forbes magazine website, authored by financial planner/doctor Carolyn McClanahan, suggests that the relationship between doctors and patients is entering a third phase of its long-term evolution. Phase one was paternalistic, where the doctor told the patient what to do and the patient was expected to do it. With the rise of the Internet, the relationship has become more informational—the doctor provides the patient with a number of choices, and the patient chooses one of them.

The problem with an informational relationship is that most patients aren't really equipped to relate the choices to their health goals, which means they can be railroaded into inappropriate care. The new paradigm is a collaborative approach, where the health care provider takes the time to understand the patients' goals, needs and resources, and then helps them decide the care that is most appropriate for their situation.

It takes two to make this work, which means that you, the patient, will need to more actively participate in your doctors' visits. How? McClanahan recommends that you write out, in advance, your current symptoms, your current medication and some information about your diet. Write down the questions you would like the doctor to answer during your visit. Also in advance: if you have complicated issues, ask for a longer appointment.

During the visit, make certain the doctor answers your questions in laymen's terms rather than medical jargon. If testing is ordered, ask what the doctor wants to learn from the test, and how the results might change the approach to treatment. If the doctor cannot provide a clear answer, ask if the test is really necessary. Ask what you can do to improve the situation—like changing your diet or adding a more rigorous exercise regimen.

Before the visit is over, make sure you know what's going to happen next, and why. If the doctor seems hurried or impatient with your questions, or is not able to tell you how you can improve your health circumstances on your own, then ask for a referral to the appropriate nutritionist, physical therapist or a more patient medical practitioner. If you're dissatisfied, make sure the doctor and the health care organization understands why—because you won't get collaborative health care unless you force these organizations to evolve to the next level of doctor-patient relationship.

*By Bob Veres, publisher of [Inside Information](#) - the premier publication of financial industry trends and information for leading practitioners in the financial planning profession.*