



Take Control of Your Own Health Care

Photo by Gokhan Okur courtesy Stock Xchng.

I've been a business leader for over 24 years and have learned a lot of important lessons, many of which are relevant not only to business, but to life in general. One of the most important things I've learned is to be prepared and to take control. More importantly, my experience as a successful business leader has taught me that one of the greatest gifts I can give others is inspiration and empowerment. The result is a team of employees with the confidence to take control and make their own decisions, creating a trusting and mutually respectful environment.

When the epiphany hit me during my dad's dying days from cancer in 2004, I decided then and there to dedicate my life to making a difference. I specifically wanted to make a change in Canada's health care, and a difference in the lives of those touched by profound illness through championing and advocating for them. My role as President of Best Doctors has been a rewarding experience, allowing me to reach millions of Canadians through our work. I've learned that business skills are indeed transferable and that this acumen can be applied in many ways to my mission of making a difference.

Where once I empowered employees, I now work to empower patients and their families by leading them through the often-daunting

world of health care. Empowerment through knowledge provides the tools and confidence necessary for all of us to take control and to become true partners with our physicians in our own health. The result is less anxiety and fear, greater confidence and clarity, and ultimately better decisions and outcomes.

There are many steps that can be taken in order to assume greater control and responsibility over our health care. One simple, yet often over-looked, step is applying the business principle of information-gathering and preparation to a doctor's visit. Physicians have, on average, only about seven minutes to spend with a patient because of the number of others they need to help each day. Preparation not only makes sure you get the most out of the visit, but it also puts you squarely where you should be: in partnership with your doctor. And, it creates a trusting and mutually respectful environment.

Here are a few tips to prepare for a Doctor's visit:

1. Make lists of medications (including current prescriptions and over-the-counter), herbal medications, and vitamins you take.
2. Bring copies of recent test results you may have had done elsewhere (ultrasounds, MRIs, blood analysis) and any specialist reports.

3. Make a written list of your medical history (previous hospitalizations, medical problems) and include any genetic factors (medical conditions of family members).
4. Bring recent readings if you suffer from chronic conditions (blood sugar, blood pressure, etc.).
5. Keep a log if you have a current medical issue to share with your physician. For example, if you have stomach pains, note what hurts, where it hurts, when it hurts (constant or intermittent), how it hurts (sharp, throbbing, aching), and any factors that might be related (like foods you've eaten at the time of onset, etc.).
6. Consider bringing an advocate such as a family member or friend with you to your appointment, particularly if it is a complicated condition or there are serious decisions to make about your care. She can be a set of ears, take notes, ask questions, and provide support.
7. Make a list of any questions you may have that you would like answered; a list makes sure you don't forget what you want answered.
8. Set goals for the visit. Create a list of what you want to discuss – seven minutes isn't a lot of time. Stay focused and on point so that you can make the most of it.



Written By **Dianne Carmichael**—PRESIDENT OF BEST DOCTORS CANADA (GO TO BESTDOCTORS.CANADA.COM FOR MORE INFO) AND A WOMEN'S POST HEALTH COLUMNIST. FIND MORE OF DIANNE'S COLUMNS AT WOMENSPOST.CA.