

HEALTH MATTERS

with Dianne Carmichael

It's your health – be absolutely sure. Your physician has four to five minutes, on average, to review your medical file: Could something be missed?



In my columns, I like to share things I've learned – 'life lessons' I've gleaned along the way – sometimes from personal experience, and sometimes from the work I do. Here's one that is not only a life lesson, but could be a life saver.

As Canadians, we are truly fortunate to have a universal health care system – that means every man, woman and child has equal access to care. The downside of this wonderfully caring system, however, is its toll on physician time. As our population grows and citizens age, health care providers are faced with managing an overburdened system. Physicians simply have less and less time to devote to each of us. In fact, recent studies suggest that physicians spend, on average, just seven minutes with us per visit. And just four to five minutes reviewing our medical records. To put that in perspective, consider that by the time you've finished reading this column; your physician will have finished reviewing your medical file.

For Brad, this could have been fatal.

Brad went to see his doctor when he experienced an alarming numbness on one side of his body. An MRI revealed a spinal cord tumour and he was referred to a Neurosurgeon.

Treatment was considered straightforward but risky: radiation followed by surgery to remove the tumour. There was a high risk of paralysis and even death.

Brad turned to his company's employee benefit plan which included a second opinion and medical consultation service. A second review of his entire medical history revealed a previously overlooked detail, one that would turn out to be of critical importance to Brad's life. A family history of hemangioma – malformed blood vessels – had been missed in the original review.

A special imaging study was ordered as a result, which confirmed he did not have a tumour at all. In fact, radiation under the circumstances may have led to fatal bleeding and was subsequently cancelled. Brad's

neurosurgeon was able to successfully perform a modified surgery, specific to his condition.

Without the careful, informed review completed on Brad's behalf, vital information that made a life-saving difference would never have come to light. And the world of entertainment would have missed a shining star.

You see, this year Brad is fully recovered and focused on his passion. He is the executive producer of an award-winning, hit TV show, and enjoying life and family to the fullest. Last year, Brad was a patient who might have died. Why? Because a seemingly insignificant detail buried in his medical records went unnoticed due to a lack of time.

Life-saving lesson? When time is precious, things can be overlooked. When it comes to your life and your health – or that of your family's – try to take every step you can to be absolutely sure. Help your doctor make the most of your seven minutes together by providing him all the facts. And then be sure diagnosis and treatment are based on them.

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