



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via **Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI)**. Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org.

Asking Your Doctor the Important Questions

Let's face it; going to the doctor is not an ideal item on a list of tasks. The culture of medicine can be an intimidating place for many. Even more, a recent diagnosis can offer several unknown questions in a patient's life. When a caregiver attends these appointments, one experiences the unnerving feeling of what news they might hear about their loved one. Although anxiety mounts when you tend to enter the room and speak with your loved one's doctor, it is important that your voice is heard and that you have expressed your concerns.

Barriers often get in the way of caregivers asking questions at initial appointments. The length of visits has been major hurdles that larger health care facilities are trying to address. Lack of rapport with just one physician or specialist can make caregivers uneasy to report their concerns or questions about an illness. There is still the notion of many that the doctor is the "all knowing" professional and that you should not challenge the authority of someone with an advanced degree. However, most professionals want to hear what you and your loved one are going through and any feedback you have to offer.

The following questions can help new caregivers gather basic information from their doctors. This however is not an inclusive list, and caregivers are encouraged to raise additional questions related to the specific diagnosis.

1. What are Symptoms of this diagnosis?

New caregivers are often afraid to show their vulnerability in not knowing specifics of a diagnosis. You would be shocked to hear the number of caregivers who leave an appointment and are frustrated at not finding out basic information about their loved one's diagnosis. Finding out what to see or expect from the course of a diagnosis can help inform your doctor of the progression or regression of the illness at the next visit. Additionally, this information alleviates some anxiety and stress of the caregiver through the initial phases of treatment.

2. What is this person able to do and not able to do?

Many first-time caregivers are unsure how to handle the daily living activities and tasks of their loved ones. Doctors typically have experience in knowing what patients can handle during the early stages of a diagnosis. Find out what the illness can limit the person from doing. Are they able to drive? Can they continue with previous exercise routines? What is their diet going to look like with their recent diagnosis?

3. What are the most helpful things I can do as a caregiver?

Once you are your loved one's caregiver, many of the responsibilities of your loved one are now going to fall into your hands. Asking the question not only informs you as a caregiver and your role in the adjustment but helps build rapport between you as the caregiver and the doctor. Physicians can offer caregivers some boundaries around what can help or hurt an individual's functioning and coping around an illness.

4. How can I get more information on the medications they are taking?

With more medications hitting the market, it's increasingly difficult for family members and caregivers to track the side effects, dosing and administration of a specific prescription. Monitoring medications for your loved one is one of the most important tasks for primary caregivers to assume. Knowing the medication schedule can help you as a caregiver and your loved one work out a schedule for taking the medication and working around daily living tasks.

5. What is the plan of treatment going forward?

You should not have to leave the doctor's office with an ambiguous outlook of what the illness will hold. Having a tentative idea of future medical appointments, procedures, surgeries, or examinations, will help caregivers schedule their time better and be more informed of the treatment options of their loved one.

6. What options are available if the diagnosis gets worse?

Of course, we want to see the optimistic side of an illness and find ways that the patient can recover effectively. The question is usually not in the mindset of new caregivers, partially because it is a daunting thought to consider. Caregivers must be prepared if symptoms or the course of an illness start to deteriorate. Your doctor will appreciate your forward thinking and considering all possible options down the road.

7. Can I have a copy of the records?

The medical information of a patient is not limited to professionals. With a release of information and signed authorization, caregivers can receive a copy of medical records. These copies will be able to help you keep track of the progress of your loved one between appointments. Additionally, you can always bring the records to the next appointment and ask further questions.

8. How can I reach you if I have any further questions?

Communication should not be limited to just appointments. This question can show your doctor that you are motivated to be involved in your loved one's treatment plan. Yes, doctors are extremely busy and have limited windows of time for phone and email communication. But it is important to have some assurance that your doctor will be a supportive resource through this challenging time.

The journey of medical appointments after a family member or loved one has received a diagnosis should be a collaborative process. Because of high patient loads, doctors can miss valuable information discussed in short appointments. As a caregiver, you play a vital role in the treatment that a patient receives.

One of the recent missions in the healthcare system is to make medicine more patient and family-centered. Illness does not only affect your loved one, but also those involved in the care and responsibilities of the individual. Never feel that a medically-related question is a dumb question. After all, you are the closest witness to the daily symptoms, struggles and living activities of your loved one.

The information in this article was adapted from Max Zubatsky, Today's Caregiver, July 2018.

***If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-quilford.org**

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program
Completing the Care