



Empowerment Through Patient Education: How to Play an Active Role in Your Healthcare

Sunday, November 7, 2021



The phrase “knowledge is power” rings true in healthcare encounters as much as it does in day-to-day life. “Patient education is important so that patients can make informed decisions in their care and treatment plans,” says Mike Zincone, Senior Director of Patient Advocacy at Pfizer. Research has shown that patient education significantly improves adherence with taking prescribed medications.¹

One of the big challenges when it comes to patient education, says Zincone, is determining where to look. "Health information is available to support patient needs; the issue is knowing which resources are credible and where to find them."

In order for patients to become educated, Zincone says it's important for them to talk to their healthcare providers about what information is credible and which organizations could help them in their health experiences. In addition, patients should speak candidly about their own goals and values so they can make important decisions in tandem with their healthcare team. "Speak up for what's important to you," adds Patti Jewell, Senior Director of Patient Advocacy at Pfizer, "and ask the questions that are on your mind."

Here's how patients can make education a priority and play a more active role in their healthcare decisions.

Ask the experts where to find information

There's a wealth of information out there that can help people better understand different health conditions, medications, and treatment options. Pfizer, for example, works independently and with other health organizations to produce, support, and amplify programs to educate and empower patients.

One example is Find Your MBC Voice, which was created by Pfizer with the help of patient advocates to help people with metastatic breast cancer understand their diagnosis and consider treatment options. Part of the program is WMBC Radio, a show in which medical professionals, patient advocates and patients explore topics related to metastatic breast cancer.

Informed patients are better equipped to make a more personalized decision regarding their treatment, says Jewell. "Pfizer can discover and develop and deliver the best medicines, but if patients can't get access to them or don't take them once prescribed, then what good are they? Patient education programs can help get that good information to patients to support them taking the right medicine at the right time for them," she says.

Talk to your healthcare provider about the information you find

According to a 2019 Internet Use Survey by National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 42 percent of households surveyed used the Internet to research health information.² When patients find information online on their own, it's

essential that they share it with their healthcare provider before acting on it, says Zincone. “Random Google searches can conflict with medical guidance received,” he says. “It’s not always the most relevant, credible, or patient-friendly information that comes to the top.”

Jewell adds that there’s no such thing as one-size-fits-all advice in healthcare. “Each individual has certain circumstances. They should talk to a healthcare professional who can help them digest the information and make decisions,” she says.

Be open with your healthcare providers about your values and concerns so they can tailor treatment

Healthcare appointments can be stressful experiences, and doctors and nurses may be laser focused on the medical matter at hand. Still, Zincone says patients should be encouraged to speak up about their values and priorities in order to help their healthcare team make care decisions that best fit their lives. Say an artist receives a cancer diagnosis, and her doctor is considering a therapy that could cause numbness in her fingers. “What quality of life do you have if you can’t paint anymore?” asks Zincone. “They need to share what’s important to them, what they value, so a doctor can do their job to say, ‘All right, this is the best treatment option for you.’”

Zincone also shares the examples of patients who have type 2 diabetes or multiple sclerosis. In the past, most patient options were injectable medications for those conditions; now, however, there are oral options or injectables at a lesser frequency. “Treatments are evolving to take patient preference into greater consideration,” says Zincone. “It is important for patients and caregivers to share what they value so that doctors can provide a treatment that matches their lifestyle.”

To be educated as a patient, you don’t have to have a deep understanding of science or medicine. But you do have to play an active role in your health journey. That means asking questions, verifying independent information with your healthcare team, and sharing what is important to you as a patient or caregiver. When you do that, you’re positioning yourself to help make informed decisions about your own care.

Sources:

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Originally published, Sunday, November 7, 2021