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## ▶ Candid Conversations

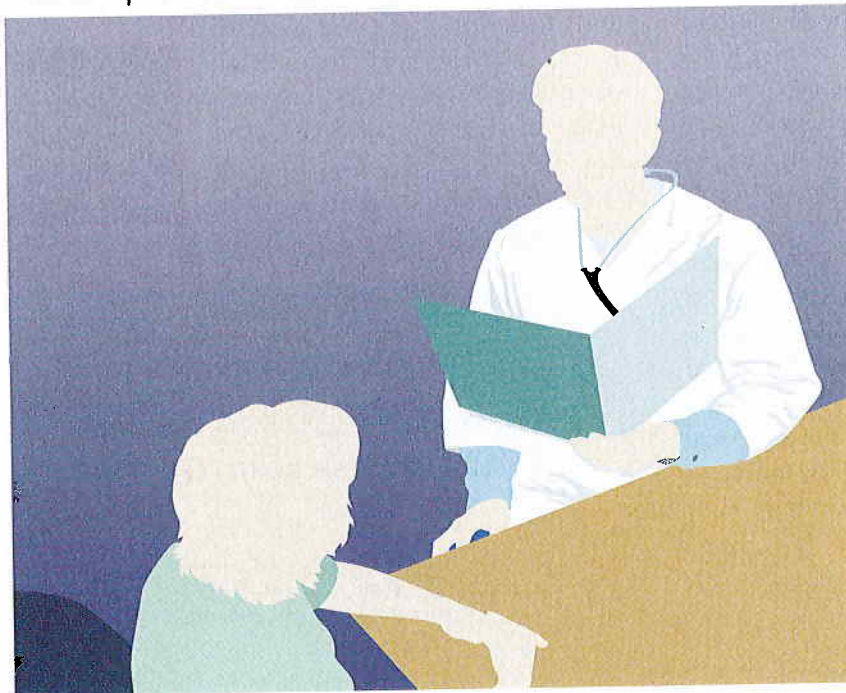
Good doctor-patient discussions make for good health care. By Sherri Lowrey-Schrandt, Mayo Clinic

Contrary to the rules of etiquette, “How are you feeling?” and “Do you have any questions?” are not just polite phrases when they come from your doctor. If you’re prepared for them, these words can be an invitation to a partnership for better medical care.

The candid exchange of information should be the primary goal of every doctor-patient visit. When patients and health care providers fully discuss health concerns, treatment options and recommendations, the result is better care.

“When we work together, patients get the health care they need and a better chance to get the outcomes they want,” says Dr. Victor Montori, a Mayo Clinic endocrinologist. “To be effective, we have to act as a team.”

“The ‘here’s your prescription’ approach, without discussing options, doesn’t serve patients well.” —Dr. Victor Montori



For the patient, that means preparing for the visit by writing down any concerns. It means answering your provider’s questions as fully and honestly as possible. And it means asking questions until you’re confident that you understand the treatment options available.

For Mayo Clinic and Montori, it means finding ways to improve doctor-patient conversations, especially the ones that center on treatment recommendations, so that patients understand the options and participate—to the extent they want—in making health care decisions. That increases the likelihood patients will follow through with the decisions after they leave the doctor’s office.

“The ‘here’s your prescription’ approach, without discussing options,

doesn’t serve patients well,” says Montori. “It’s well documented that many patients don’t fill prescriptions or they fail to complete a course of medication. And patients don’t necessarily tell their doctors about the choices they make after the visit.”

To help spark conversation so that treatment decisions get made during the appointment and not afterward, Montori and a team of Mayo researchers began to develop discussion guides. The guides help the physician convey health risks and treatment options and encourage feedback from the patient. As a result, the team found that patients were three times as likely to stick to the agreed-upon treatment.

“Typical conversations with patients about prescription medications tend to be brief and incomplete,” says Montori. “The guides helped start a dialogue that empowered patients, now better informed, to participate in important decisions.”

While the research showed that the discussion guides were helpful, they aren’t always necessary. Montori suggests that when faced with any proposed new treatment plan, patients ask their doctors the following questions:

- What are the risks of this condition?
- How does treatment change the risks?
- What are the pros and cons of various treatment options, including the option of doing nothing?

The ensuing conversation will allow the doctor and patient to agree on a treatment, taking into account the best science and the patient’s preferences. Because just-what-the-doctor-ordered doesn’t work well unless patients’ perspectives are considered, too. ▼

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