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## KNOW: Your Role, Rights, and Responsibilities

Integrative medicine is patient-centered. That means you're the captain of your own healthcare and a partner with your practitioner(s). Follow these tips to make sure you're savvy and in-control!

### **Practice full disclosure.**

Always tell your practitioner(s) about everyone you see and everything you take or do for disease treatment or health promotion. This means *every* IM therapy, and *every* IM provider. Studies show that many people do not reveal their use of integrative medicine to their practitioners. At the very least, omitting this crucial information might prevent your providers and/or therapies from complementing one another. In many cases, non-disclosure could lead to unhealthy or even dangerous interactions between therapies, drugs, diets, and activities.

### **Think addition, not subtraction.**

Retain what already works for you. **Don't** give up conventional therapies that work. **Do** discuss/ask how new treatments might be integrated into your existing healthcare.

### **Prepare.**

Preparation helps you get the most out of a visit by being sure you don't forget something crucial, by saving time in getting information to your doctor, and by helping you focus on what is most important to you.

1. Before seeing a new practitioner, prepare by listing:
  - Your health problems in order of current importance
  - Your prior hospitalizations and surgeries
  - Your allergies
  - Any prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements, etc... that you are taking
2. Before each visit, including new and return visits:
  - Write down your goals for the visit – what you don't want to leave without having accomplished. Prioritize them in case time is short.
  - Write down your questions (doctors prefer patients who ask questions)
  - Write down your concerns and worries
  - If you've done research, bring it with you.
3. If you believe you might get bad news:
  - Bring someone close to you with for support
  - Bring a tape recorder and audiotape the visit, so you can review it when you have calmed down and so family or helpers can also hear what was said.

## **Be a patient patient.**

Don't get frustrated if your provider can't answer your questions immediately. Ask if he/she may be willing to research your concern or ask colleagues about the subject.

## **Understand possible hesitation or expressed concerns.**

A healthcare professional may advise against certain integrative therapies for very good reasons, such as quality, safety, efficacy, negative interactions with other treatments, or lack of evidence supporting benefit or safety. Be open to these precautions.

## **Review the plan with your practitioner.**

Ask your healthcare provider four basic questions about your treatment:

1. What kind of benefits can I expect from this treatment, and how soon will I see the benefits?
2. What are the side effects and risks of this treatment?
3. How much will this cost?
4. What is the evidence for or against this therapy?

## **Require respect.**

Whatever your question or concern, remember that you deserve respect from your care providers. Not only do you deserve it as a consumer, respect impacts the quality of your healthcare. If you feel disrespected, you won't feel free to ask questions, negotiate, disagree, learn, and talk.

## **Do not settle when you choose or stay with a doctor.**

As a visit progresses, if you feel that you haven't been heard or respected, that your doctor is not listening, or that you are so uncomfortable with the person or environment you would feel inhibited to call or come back, keep looking! Changing providers is a reasonable decision. You should also feel empowered to request second opinions at any time. For serious procedures, getting a second opinion from an independent person is a critical safeguard.

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