## **When Your Loved One’s Doctor Is Lousy At Communication**

It has happened to most of us. You walk out of the doctor’s office and are a little unclear–how long are you are supposed to take that medication? Or when you should call for another appointment if things don’t improve? What was the name of that specialist you should see? Particularly with older patients, not understanding the doctor\* can have far-reaching consequences.

While many doctors have excellent communication skills, some don’t—they are great diagnosticians, but their social skills are lacking. But even the ones possessing excellent communication skills may not pick up cues that their older patients aren’t clear on instructions. How do older patients (and their family members) make sure they are getting the information they need?

1. Take notes. When the healthcare provider sees you writing her instructions, she will often slow down.
2. Hit record. Most cell phones allow you to record a conversation—just ask the doctor’s permission before you do so.
3. Ask for a print-out. Many medical offices now offer printed materials to go. This can include information about your diagnosis, follow-up, and medication.
4. Make a friend. Is there a nurse, medical aide, or office manager that you connect with? It’s great to have a relationship with a person you can call when you remember that important question once you’ve gotten home. Often a nurse or office staff person will be able to ask the doctor your question and return your call more quickly than the doctor.
5. Tell the doctor your concerns. Good doctors want you to be clear about their diagnosis and directions. Most of them will make an effort to explain things more clearly or figure out a way to accommodate the needs of their older patients.
6. Worst case scenario: fire the doctor! As Baby Boomers are moving into “older age” they are more open to this than those oldest patients from the GI and Silent Generations (Traditionalists). Many Traditionalists revere the doctor and can’t fathom “letting the doctor go.” But if the doctor really won’t work to communicate better with you, it’s a reasonable and necessary decision to start looking for a new provider.

\*It’s not just doctors who are lousy at communication with older patients sometimes. These tips are useful for when you run into these issues with social workers, nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, physical therapists, and anyone else you may encounter in healthcare!

**Jennifer L. FitzPatrick, MSW, LCSW-C, CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) is a speaker, consultant, author and founder of Jenerations Health Education, Inc. One of less than 800 Certified Speaking Professionals worldwide, Jennifer is the author of Reimagining Customer Service in Healthcare and Cruising Through Caregiving: Reducing The Stress of Caring For Your Loved One. She was a gerontology instructor at Johns Hopkins University's Certificate on Aging program for over a decade and has been featured on ABC, CBS, Sirius XM and in *Forbes, U.S. News & World Report, Redbook, Fast Company* and countless other media outlets. Her board appointments include serving as a Care Advisory Board Member for Seth Rogen & Lauren Miller Rogen's non-profit HFC (Hilarity for Charity). For more information please go to** [**www.jenerationshealth.com**](http://www.jenerationshealth.com) **.**