



HOW TO BE A MODEL PATIENT

By Banchory group Practice Patient Participation Group

Some general notes of advice on how to make the most of the time spent with your GP. These are compiled by your fellow patients who support BANCHORY GROUP PRACTICE as members of the Patient Participation Group and the surgery team.

APPOINTMENT TIME - This is normally 10 minutes unless you have a condition which might require more. You will be cared for during that time and if needs arise it will be extended until the doctor is satisfied that he or she has done their best. Do remember that if the doctor's appointments are running late there will be good reason why the previous patient needed more than 10 minutes. You might be the needy one next time. Doctors often run late and we must be understanding of the circumstances and allow additional time to accommodate this possibility.

LISTS - If your memory is helped by jotting down a few symptoms this should result in a more productive appointment. Don't however present a list to the doctor and expect to work through every item. There just isn't time. Ensure that you know which problem is the priority for that visit, though it is important for the doctor to see your list as often problems you see as separate are linked.

IF YOU ARRIVE LATE – Your appointment may be passed and another patient is now being seen. The doctor will usually try to fit you in (particularly in the case of bad weather or other disruption) but this may be at the end of the surgery. Please do not be offended if you are asked to wait. You must be understanding and forgiving if you are going to be seen that day but with a delay. If you have a reputation for being late you might not be seen that day and asked to make another appointment.

YOUR DOCTOR IS NOT A MIND READER - It is important that you can immediately tell the doctor why you are there no matter how private, worrying or embarrassing that might be. If you think you have cancer, for example, say so immediately or if you want to exclude a rare condition because your mother had it, then please let the doctor know so that he/she can waste no time in examining you and often reassuring you.

YOUR DOCTOR IS NOT A SPECIALIST – He or she is a GENERALIST with a minimum of 5 years of training after attending medical school. General Practitioners (GP's) have a vast array of knowledge and experience and can quickly decide what can be dealt with there and then and what requires referral elsewhere. Junior doctors at A and E departments have considerably less experience than your local GP. Unless you have an emergency, you are in the RIGHT PLACE.

YOUR DOCTOR WANTS THE BEST FOR YOU – If your doctor decides not to prescribe anything, or refer you for investigation, it is usually because he or she feels that you don't need this. Many patients arrive at the surgery and request an anti-biotic, or an x-ray, as a form of self-diagnosis and can be disappointed if their wishes aren't met.

DOCTORS ON FILM AND TV – If you are a fan you might note that the doctors get the diagnosis right first time and all ends happily. Hollywood and the film makers are focussed on entertaining you and most of us love medical dramas !! In real life many conditions are not obvious and may take time and patience to diagnose. A persistent cough for example might be a sign of simple viral infection or an early sign of lung cancer. In many cases time will tell and you will be invited for a later appointment together with a good briefing about what signs you must look for if the condition deteriorates. Never be afraid to ask the GP about how to keep an eye on the problem. It is all too easy to miss vital signs of a change in a medical situation. BE ON THE LOOKOUT ALWAYS.

DOCTORS WORK A LONG AND TIRING DAY – Most GPs see some 18 to 20 patients every morning, followed by home visits, and the same again in the afternoon. They must make time to read reports from hospital departments and consultants, write letters, telephone patients and work longer hours than most people.

THE SURGERY RECEPTIONIST – Their role is not to bar your way to the doctor. They are to be trusted, just as you trust your doctor, to keep any discussion confidential. Do feel comfortable with all of this and be aware that it will help your doctor if the receptionist can provide him or her with a brief description of your problem. Everyone working in the surgery is covered by the same confidentiality clauses and their lips are sealed. If you share your problem with the receptionist, they can signpost you to the most appropriate support and might suggest that the surgery is not the best place for you and recommend another option. This can save your time and the doctor's. If you are polite and friendly you can expect the same behaviour from the receptionist and, if you happen to be a regular patient, you might be surprised when your voice is recognised and welcomed.

FOOTNOTE – *These local tips and pieces of advice are offered to you by members of your local PPG Group, many of whom are very regular patients at BANCHORY GROUP PRACTICE fortunately or unfortunately. They have a thorough understanding of how things work locally and have excellent relationships with the doctors and the entire medical team. This has helped each one of them cope with their own medical condition, some minor and others more serious, and have much respect and gratitude for the surgery and the staff. It is their desire to share their experiences to the advantage of the local population.*