



HEALTH AWARENESS

Empowering Patients With Online Information

(NAPSA)—Increasingly, computers are becoming an important part of Americans' day-to-day lives—even in such settings as the doctor's office.

Over the past few years, physicians have taken to using computers to look up the latest health information in order to provide the most appropriate diagnosis. Doctors had previously left the exam room in order to consult other medical references. Today, numerous health care providers have portable or desktop computers in their exam rooms. This immediacy of information means patients can play a more active role in their checkups.

If your doctor uses a computer during your examination, there are a few steps you can take to get the most out of your visit and potentially increase your comfort level with this technology:

- If you feel the computer is getting in the way, separating you and your physician, ask that monitors and devices be repositioned for easier communication.

- If your doctor checks something on the computer, ask why.

- Ask if you can see the information being accessed, which might give insight into your condition or care. Ask the doctor to print or e-mail available patient education information.

Online resources

Health care is constantly changing and clinicians need to have access to up-to-date information to provide the best care for their patients. Today's physicians are challenged with remembering an abundance of information, such as which drug interacts with another, and keeping current on new drugs and clinical findings.

While many physicians had previously gone online to use consumer-oriented medical Web sites, there are now sites created specifically for doctors, delivering



Doctors are increasingly accessing the Web as a routine part of patient care, looking up the most current health information.

practical and relevant diagnosis and treatment guidance at the immediate point of care. With such Web references as Epocrates Online, clinicians can easily access practical and concise information that quickly supports clinical decisions.

When your physician is looking at a clinical reference, he or she has the most current medical information on hand to provide you the best care. Your doctor could be online to identify the appropriate test to confirm a diagnosis or treatment protocols for a presenting condition.

Your doctor may also be checking critical prescribing information such as drug dosing or health plan coverage. You can even get more involved in the process by “brown bagging” it. Bring in your current medications—prescription, over-the-counter or herbal—and ask your doctor to check for potentially harmful interactions among the drugs you are taking.

Patients who see a computer in the exam room should ask their doctor if he or she is using an online clinical reference, such as the free Epocrates resource, and how it can improve the visit.

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.epocrates.com.