



## Do your employees know how to talk to their doctor?

*It could help them take charge of their health and save money*

Health care can be complicated and even confusing. The best way for consumers to avoid being overwhelmed by uncertainty is to become health care literate. This doesn't just mean learning big words, it also means knowing how to talk to doctors so you have a better understanding of how to follow recommendations, take medications correctly and take charge of your health.

"When people don't understand the information given to them by their doctors, they are more likely to be in poor health," says Danielle Freeman, Network Education Representative. "That is why it is important for everyone to know how to talk to their doctor."

Consumers who talk openly with their doctor and get the most from their appointments may also save money for their health plan and reduce their out-of-pocket costs. By being engaged and more proactive with their health, your employees can avoid issues that are more complex and the need for additional care.

### **How can an employee be best prepared to talk to their doctors?**

Being prepared can make a big difference in the success of an appointment with a doctor. Employees should have a general list of questions that they would like the answers to, such as what should I do to prevent or delay health problems, are there tests or screenings I should have, and am I due for vaccines. Employees should also be prepared to ask questions directly related to the reason for their visit.

In addition, having a list of all prescription and over-the-counter medications, other drugs, vitamins and any herbal remedies they are currently taking can help the doctor get a full picture of their health. They should also make note of any nutritional drinks or shakes, herbal teas, energy drinks, coffee and alcohol they drink.

Being prepared for an appointment will show the doctor that the patient is engaged and ready to do their part to maintain good health.

### **What about during an appointment?**

During an appointment, employees should ask questions and then listen diligently while the doctor responds. They should feel empowered to ask for clarification if they don't understand something, repeat the information back to the doctor and even have a piece of paper with them to take notes.

Before leaving the appointment, employees should know what their main issue is, what they need to do to treat it, and why the recommended treatment is important. If they aren't clear on these three points, they need ask for clarification, or schedule a follow-up appointment.

Employees should also pay close attention to any referrals that the doctor orders. The rule of thumb for referrals is to ask, "Why are we doing this?" Employees need to understand the need for the referral, the expected outcome, and whether or not the doctor or facility they are

being referred to is in-network. If they are not in-network, they should ask if an alternative is available. The same is true when being referred for lab tests, imaging or other outpatient services. Employees should understand the need, expected outcome and whether or not these services are being requested diagnostically or if it will help their condition.

When lab, imaging or outpatient services are requested, employees should pay close attention to where they are being referred, and shouldn't be afraid to ask if there are alternatives. Freestanding facilities may have less out-of-pocket costs than services received at the hospital. Employees should always feel comfortable talking to their doctor about their concerns and finding the service provider that is best for them.

### **What if an employee is diagnosed with a medical condition?**

When someone is diagnosed with a health problem, he or she needs to understand, in common language, what the issue is. Again, being prepared, asking questions and really listening while the doctor responds can go a long way in understanding the condition. Some of the common questions employees should ask about their condition include, what is the name of the condition, how it is spelled, what does it mean, what may have caused it, and how long it will last? Employees should also inquire about treatment options and how they can learn more.