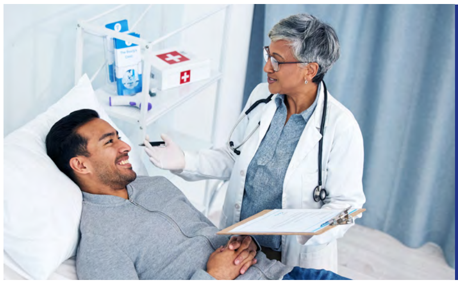
PATIENT EDUCATION & EMPOWERMENT

A Patient's Guide: Living With a New Diagnosis



If you're newly diagnosed, you'll encounter a lot of information, such as available treatment options or strategies to reduce insurance barriers. As a patient, you will hear medical and clinical terms, which can certainly be overwhelming.

To help make sense of your situation, consider these tips when discussing your treatment:

- **Take a moment to process your diagnosis.** It's normal to feel overwhelmed or have a strong emotional reaction. Give yourself time to adjust before trying to absorb all the information.
- **Bring a trusted friend or family member with you to your appointment.** They can ask questions you may not think of, take notes, or even record the conversation (with your provider's permission) for later review.
- **Write down your questions before your provider's visit.** List the most important ones first to ensure they are answered and leave space to write down the answers for future reference.
- **Ask your provider to show you diagrams or drawings that may help increase your understanding.** It's important to understand your treatment plan. If you have any questions, ask to speak with a nurse.
- **Learn more about your treatment team.** Your treatment team may consist of any number of specialists. Remember that your primary care provider is also an important part of your team, so be sure to keep them in the loop.
- **You usually have time to explore different treatment options (including clinical trials) before deciding, as long as your provider hasn't advised immediate action.** Allow yourself time to ask questions, speak with family and friends, or seek a second opinion, without feeling rushed by your provider. Remember that it's also okay to ask your provider questions about the cost of your care and treatment.

BECOMING AN EMPOWERED PATIENT

It's important to realize that you can improve your medical outcomes by taking responsibility for your own healthcare decisions. Partner with your providers and actively participate in your care to achieve the best possible outcomes. Being engaged from the beginning will help both you and your providers. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Ask your provider for resources to learn more about your diagnosis (if that is your preference)!
- Make the most out of every appointment with your specialist.
- Ensure you understand your health insurance benefits and limitations.
- Speak up if something doesn't feel right. You know your body better than anyone else.

INFORMED CHOICES LET YOU TAKE THE LEAD

Most patients have a variety of treatment options available. Treatment plans may include standard therapies that are successful for most patients, or cutting-edge and promising therapies new to the market. Your provider may want to utilize a personalized treatment based on your disease type, complementary or holistic approaches, or a combination approach.

The decision is ultimately yours to make based on the information you have available. Several factors influence treatment decisions, including genetics, the specifics of your illness, fertility, age, potential side effects, other medical conditions, and your provider's experience. You have the right and the responsibility to ask questions throughout your treatment.

You're not just a passenger in your treatment; you're the driver. Be actively involved in every step.

Ask why your medical team has designed the specific treatment plan for you and why other options are not recommended in your case. Do not be afraid to seek a second opinion, even if you have no reason to disagree with your provider. Sometimes another medical professional can give a fresh perspective or can confirm what your original medical team has suggested. In any case, more information will only help you feel confident in your choices.

SECOND OPINIONS ARE ALWAYS AN OPTION

A second opinion is when another provider reviews your medical records to give you advice based on their training and expertise, most frequently to provide diagnosis or treatment recommendations. Providers often encourage seeking a second opinion and understand their importance. Most insurance plans cover second opinions, and they are so common that many providers expect patients to seek them. Often, you can ask your provider for suggestions on whom to visit for a second opinion. Otherwise, you can contact your health insurance for a list of providers within your network.

Second opinions are a normal part of receiving the best possible care. A second opinion is NOT second-guessing your provider.

SECOND OPINION CASE STUDY

Below is a scenario illustrating why second opinions are important:

Sarah was diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer. Her oncologist recommended a lumpectomy followed by radiation therapy. Sarah, wanting to explore all her options, sought a second opinion from a different oncologist. The second oncologist discussed the possibility of participating in a clinical trial for a newer, less invasive treatment option. Sarah qualified for the trial and, after careful consideration, decided to pursue it. The second opinion opened her eyes to an alternative that better suited her preferences and potentially offered fewer long-term side effects.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL

Emotional support is a component of treatment and recovery that is often overlooked. Caring for your emotional well-being is an integral part of your care. A chronic disease diagnosis can be life-altering and may cause a lot of emotional unrest for you and your family or caregivers. Also, research and patient experience show that focusing on your emotional health can be beneficial to your other treatments.

To find the best support, consider these resources:

- Peer connections of others with your diagnosis
- Support groups (both in-person and online)
- Professional-led therapy (in-person, via phone, and online)
- Many local churches offer faith-based support groups that are open to the community
- Ask your provider for a list of support groups
- Find support options by searching in PAF's National Financial Resource Directory online at **www.patientadvocate.org/financial**

Curious about other topics? PAF's **Education Resource Library** houses our resources and provides straightforward information in a variety of formats to help you make informed decisions throughout your healthcare journey. Learn about health insurance, disability, medical bill management, and more by visiting our Education Resource Library today. Call us anytime at 800-532-5274 or visit **www.patientadvocate.org** for help!

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The Patient Education and Empowerment Department creates resources that address a range of topics from medical debt to insurance access and disability benefits. The resources we produce are reflective of real-world experiences that meet the needs of the patients PAF serves.