

A Spoonful of Sugar Doesn't Work Here

Written by Susan Murphy
Tuesday, 27 June 2017 16:00



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Dear Aunt Bossy,

I am having some serious health issues and have had to see some specialists. My internist is a concierge doctor and could not be more competent and caring, but I am running into such rude and uncaring people in other medical offices.

From the receptionist to the phone to the doctor, they treat me like I am imposing on them when I ask for anything, including an appointment. For example, I had an MRI the other day, and they told me I needed an appointment in a week to get the results and see the doctor. That is ridiculous. I am in great pain and am terribly worried about what might be wrong with me.

Fortunately, my main doctor called and got some of the results so he could calm me down and give me some advice.

My friends all say they get the same bad treatment at many medical offices. What is going on? It didn't used to be like this.

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Sick of being sick.

Dear SOS,

First of all, we delude ourselves when we expect doctors to be devoted, caring and communicative healers and consultants. We have a hard enough time finding good hairdressers and car mechanics, so why should the medical industry be any different?

When you realize that many of these people decided to be doctors before they were old enough to have any sense at all, and after hundreds of thousands of dollars and hours, find themselves in jobs they might not have chosen if given a choice today, especially since they are no longer guaranteed to get richly rewarded financially. They feel stuck. This does not excuse poor behavior, much less poor medicine.

At least we are in Beaufort where people tend to be nice and caring, so you can imagine what it is like in a less "gentle" environment. In New York, I often suspected the person next to me in the waiting room had ebola or tuberculosis, and my doctor was so depressed I felt like I had to take care of her. This was in one of the top three medical centers in the country.

What to do? Don't put up with it. If you are kept waiting for more than a half hour, ask the receptionist what is going on, and unless your physician has had an emergency, you leave and tell them you'll make another appointment.

Prepare a list of questions - write them down - for your doctor when you do actually get to see him or her. We are often nervous in their offices, and have a difficult time remembering what they said. Some of them are so tightly scheduled that the patient feels rushed and forgets to ask important things. You don't have to suffer because of *their* schedule.

Question their advice and decisions. Do not be a meek patient. I recently saw a doctor who

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wanted to put me on statins. I said no, I will not take them. He got nasty, and said, "Do you want to have a heart attack OR a stroke?" If I do, he will be the last to know. I'm outta his practice.

Keep your gatekeeper doctor informed of the behavior of the other doctors. He or she needs to know, so they can get bad behavior corrected and pinpoint the doctors who know how to treat people well.

For your part, do not waste their time. They don't need to know about your vacation or your grandkid's graduation. They might be polite, but they do not have the time.

I am lucky to have a fabulous doctor, whose name I will not reveal here as he is not taking any new patients. He is a listener, takes his time. He respects my aversion to pharmaceuticals, but won't let me get away with being stupid about my counterculture leanings. Oh, and he is gorgeous and funny and cool. I would fight like a hyena to keep him.

Finding a great doctor is not easy, but you need to put as much time into it as you would in finding a good hairdresser. Do remember, though, that hair grows back, but your heart or spine won't. Be careful out there.

Be well,

Aunt Bossy

PS: I'm not a real doctor, but my first job as a teen was washing used syringes and sharpening the needles. This was before disposable needles, but after leeches were popular, or I couldn't have worked in a medical office.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who

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adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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