Top 10 questions to ask your doctor

before accepting medical treatment

This is most important pre-surgery in a teaching hospital where you want to be sure who will be doing the surgery.

Doctors know you may be under stress. That you may be nervous. So sit down. You're not the tough DA on Law & Order. Ask your questions in a conversational way, not a confrontational way.

1. How long have you been in practice? And how long in this community? For a minor ailment, long experience may not matter. For something complex or hard to diagnose, it may matter a lot.

2. For surgery: What is your experience in doing this procedure, or treating this condition? How many have you performed? What is a typical result in solving the problem, and in patient recuperation?

3. If the proposed treatment is surgery: Who will be in the OR (operating room)? Will you be there? The whole time?

4. Are you personally going to perform the surgery?

5. If a student in a teaching hospital does the surgery, ask: How can you be reassured the work will be excellent? Will others assist and participate in a major way?

6. What can go wrong? What are the possible complications?

7. Are there treatment options that you, or this hospital, are not offering at this time? What are they, and what are the pros and cons? Ask for more detail if you don't understand the answer. (Under stress it's easy for any patient's mind to wander.)

8. If you feel the need for a second opinion, and if time permits, ask the doctor: Who would you go to, outside your own partners or practice, for this condition? Discuss the second opinion with your doctor — don't just switch.

9. May I ask your bookkeeper what my financial responsibility will be? You need to know this in advance — and don't be afraid to negotiate.

A closing hint:

10. Hospitals begin new student rotations every July — a busy month. If you can avoid complex in-hospital procedures in July, you should.

Notes

Based on Dr. Pierce Scranton, *Death on the Learning Curve,*

Dr. Pierce Scranton, as heard on *The People's Pharmacy*

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