How to Make the Most of Osteoarthritis Doctor Appointments

by ALI ESFAHANI

Optimizing Osteoarthritis Doctor Appointments

As both a patient and healthcare professional in training, I have witnessed how important a healthy relationship between the healthcare professional and patient can be.

Not just physicians — physical therapists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, nurses, and many other professionals are all integral parts of the healthcare team that a patient with osteoarthritis (OA) interacts with.

Unfortunately, the management of chronic pain and physical limitations can be frustrating and difficult for both the healthcare provider and the patient. Here are a few tips I have learned over the years that help minimize frustration and foster a positive relationship with your osteoarthritis doctor and other healthcare professionals.

Go in With Open-minded

It took an incredibly long time and I had to see a lot of healthcare professionals before I achieved adequate pain-relief. During that time I became jaded and close-minded to what any healthcare professional could offer me.

I figured I knew more about the pain I experienced than they did and didn't think my experience with pain would be understood by them. However, little by little, I started to listen to what doctors were telling me.

I realized they're more qualified than I am in understanding how to treat my pain and that maybe I need to have an open mind to what advice they've been providing me.

As a patient, I am still chronically guilty of going into many doctors' offices with a closed mind. I try to justify this by thinking I know a lot or am qualified to my opinion, but it does me no good.

Putting our trust in healthcare professionals might be difficult because of bad experiences. However, by going in with an open mind, that one healthcare professional might be able to help us make our lives as normal as possible while living with chronic pain.

Try to Be Organized

A person's medical history can get complicated after having a chronic disease for so long.

The amount of hospitals, doctors, treatments and medications you have tried add up and it can be difficult for a healthcare provider to decipher through all of them simply by your memory.

Healthcare professionals for my chronic back pain, I started to keep a record of all of the places and treatments I had pursued. Although it was cumbersome, I really felt like it made getting the healthcare professional up to speed on my condition easy and we could move forward from there.

It quickly eliminated procedures they would have advised had they not seen that I already had those procedures or therapies done. Honestly, sometimes the healthcare professionals would even use my medical summary to help them document our encounter. It proved useful and doctors seemed grateful that I came prepared and organized.

Make Your Expectations Known

One of the most helpful things I have experienced as a patient is to describe to the healthcare professional what my expectations are.

I remember multiple times doctors asking me what I wanted them to do about my pain or discomfort when therapies they threw at me haven't sufficed. I realized maybe I wasn't being explicit enough in what I was expecting out of the visit.

Nowadays I try to explain to healthcare professionals the reason I'm at their offices and lay down exactly what I was hoping to get out of the visit. By being straightforward, it has allowed me to get to the point quicker and spend the majority of my time talking productively to the healthcare professionals.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask Questions

I am not beyond admitting that going to see an osteoarthritis doctor or physical therapist for the first time can be scary.

Sometimes healthcare professionals quickly sum up what they think is going on in your body followed by a hurried list of potential treatments. Many times I felt shy of asking questions, afraid the physician would get annoyed by my questions if I were to ask any.

However, I realized it does me no good if I don't understand what is being said to me. It is your right to completely understand the information being presented to you regarding your condition or treatment.

There is no shame in asking for a drawing to help you picture what is going on, or for a simple explanation regarding your condition. Many doctors I have worked with appreciate when a patient is concerned about their condition and take the time to really understand what they can do to improve their health.

It Is OK to Say No

Although you, as a patient with osteoarthritis, are seeking the help or opinion of a variety of healthcare professionals, you are not obliged to follow their recommendations immediately.

When I first injured my back, I immediately sought the help of a physical therapist.

I had the notion that any acute injury could be rehabilitated with physical therapy; this stemmed from previous successful rehabilitation of fractured ankles in high school.

That being said, physical therapy for a multitude of reasons only made my back injury worse. There were times where I was uncomfortable doing certain recommended exercises but felt the pressure to follow the commands of my physical therapist.

Those exercises ended up making my back pain worse and incapable of functioning the way I was able to function before those particular exercises.

My personal example is not meant to be an indictment on physical therapists because they are crucial for patients in their individual rehabilitation process. My point is if a treatment, exercise or medication makes you feel uncomfortable, you don't have to go through with it.

There is no harm in respectably telling the healthcare professional that at this moment you would like to know if there are other options available to you.