

BE PREPARED

To Make the Most of Your Health Care Appointments



DID YOU KNOW THAT THE AVERAGE AMOUNT OF TIME A PATIENT SPENDS WITH A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER DURING A STANDARD EXAM IS ABOUT 12 MINUTES?

Combined with the general anxiety some people feel when visiting their doctor, this can put a lot of pressure on both patients and the providers who are trying to meet all of their health care needs.

“As primary care physicians, we are the go-to people for our patients, and will become even more so as health care reform continues to evolve,” says Dr. Muhammad Gul, medical director, Baystate Medical Practices – Quabbin Adult Medicine.

He continues, “Finding a primary care provider that you feel comfortable talking to is the first step in good communication. It is also a way to ensure your good health. Your primary care doctor gets to know you and what your health is normally like. He or she can help you make medical decisions that suit

your values and daily habits and can also connect you to other medical specialists if and when you need them.”

To get the most out of your primary care visits, Gul and his colleagues recommend you:

- Bring a list of all the medications you are currently taking, including vitamins, herbs, and over-the-counter medications. Be sure to note how much you take and how often.
- Write up a list of your medical concerns and prioritize them in order of importance. Avoid waiting until the end of the appointment to mention a new symptom or problem. This will help you avoid return visits.
- Be specific when you describe symptoms. For example, if you are experiencing pain, is it sharp or dull? Is it constant or does it come and go? When did it start? Where is it located?
- If you need prescriptions refilled, bring these to the attention of

your provider during the office visit to reduce the need for call-backs.

- If you are anxious about the visit, bring a friend or family member to take notes and/or help you remember what you most wanted to ask the doctor.
- Be honest. One of your main responsibilities is to communicate openly with your health care provider. Be straightforward and honestly answer all questions. Don't just give the answer you think your doctor wants to hear. The doctor is not there to judge you, and patients who don't tell the truth about lifestyle issues like smoking, drinking, drug use, diet, or sexual activity are only hurting themselves.

“People have different medical questions and concerns at different ages, but what they need across their lifetime is a good primary care doctor who cares about them as a whole person,” says Gul. “We are your partners in health.”

For a free referral to a primary care provider on staff at a Baystate Health hospital, call Baystate Health Link at 1-800-377-4325.



Dr. Muhammad Gul