

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DOCTOR- Be Sure To Mean It If You Cry Wolf

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If you don't make every cold and cut an emergency, you (hopefully) get the doctor's attention more when you do have an illness. You deserve care when you are ill, but illnesses vary in severity. **If you don't receive attention and you truly do not cry wolf with every illness, you need to make that point to get the care you need.**

Presumably your doctor takes care of sick people as well as the worried well. Please recognize that and trust that, if you don't get an immediate response, it is because someone who is more ill than you took the doctor's time.

Don't exaggerate your symptoms to get attention or to justify complaining. If you do, your doctor won't take you seriously in the future.

I have some patients to whom a few spots of red are "a horrible rash all over." To them a joint that hurts with no discernible signs of swelling or inflammation is "the most excruciating pain I've ever had." For them, every pain rates a severity of 10 out of a possible 10. How can I get worried enough about those patients to squeeze in an appointment for them (squeezing out and inconveniencing others), when reality proves time and again that they have a minor ailment and major anxiety?

If you rarely complain or you have a chronic illness with a significant change in status, you deserve to make those points and expect to be given attention. I did a medico-legal review of a case in which a male patient complained of sudden onset of lightheadedness, fatigue and abdominal pain. The doctor saw him, but ignored the signs of acute ulcer, instead attributing his complaints to anxiety.

The patient called again, with increasing anxiety as his misery escalated. The doctor grew more convinced that anxiety was the major problem. Apparently four years previously the patient had had some headaches associated with anxiety for which he had received counseling. He called the doctor rather infrequently after that, until the current symptoms arose.

The doctor erred in assuming that every call from an anxious patient always represents anxiety. **The patient's only error was that he didn't (vehemently) remind the doctor that these were new symptoms and that he doesn't usually complain.**

On the flip side, be sure you take your own symptoms seriously enough that you ask for help when you need it.

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HEALTHY CHOICES FOR MIND AND BODY

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