

## Getting the Most Out of Your Doctor:

### Keep reminding, it's not really nagging.

by Ann Gerhardt, MD

After a doctor sees you for an initial visit, he or she often follows the human tendency to categorize you in their brain. The category may be your main diagnosis, your personality, who referred you or some other significant characteristic. Don't be offended, it's nice that the doctor remembers *something* about you. You'll probably need to remind the doctor about other details, and that's OK.

But don't let the doctor's memory entirely dictate the content of subsequent visits. Sometimes such categories get in the way of hearing new information, especially if the new info doesn't jibe with the pigeon-hole.

For example: You see the doctor, who expects this to be like every prior visit, dealing with your blood pressure and cholesterol. You mention at the beginning that your pressure has been fine on the new medicine, but you now have a new problem of joint pain. The doctor sees that your blood pressure and cholesterol are fine and looks up your meds to find that none are reported to cause joint pain. He reassures you that the medicine and you are fine and moves to leave.

You still have joint pain, which hasn't been addressed, except in the nearly irrelevant context of your medications and existing health issues. Don't assume that he addressed the issue because he thinks he has. Don't let him get away!!

Remind him that the joint pain keeps you from sleeping and exercising and you really want him to find out what's causing it and how to make it go away. Ask what else he needs to know about the

pain. Make sure he examines the offending joints. Then keep pressing until a care plan of some, any, type is formulated. You would like a diagnosis, if possible, and treatment to at least alleviate allow you to sleep. The plan should include follow-up, should the problem not resolve.

He's spent a few more minutes than planned, but your problem was addressed.

Now you are categorized as blood pressure, cholesterol, joint pain AND intent on being heard.