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Other Voices
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The changing face of health care

No longer are health care visits a brief encounter resulting in outcomes driven by the provider. Instead, the focus is on building relationships.

The nature of health care is changing — for the better.

The type of health-care reform suggested here has nothing to do with the Affordable Care Act. The change is not connected to a government program, the latest high-tech equipment, a magical pill or even a new procedure. It's about something rather fundamental, yet often overlooked in recent times — the importance of the patient-provider relationship.

Two-way communication is now more than ever the foundation for creating and establishing a strong patient-provider relationship built on trust.

The trust helps lead to a more broad-based treatment that takes into account both the physical and mental aspects, rather than the more traditional method of only treating a condition or symptoms.

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These days caring health providers are asking more questions and listening more intently to the answers in their commitment to discover more about their patients. They are focused on wellness, healing — and helping — the entire person, and the entire family.

Health care is an everyday, year-round issue. It's no longer just about the annual checkup or making an appointment when you have a bad cold, nagging cough or minor injury.

In fact, providers asking the right questions in order to learn more about their patients is just as important as encouraging an annual checkup, blood work, a flurry of tests or even more exercise and a healthy diet.

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Naturally, patients play a key role in this equation. They must be honest, open and willing to share information even if it is not confined to their physical well-being.

This could range from their current challenges — perhaps a job loss or an increase in stress at home or work — to changes in their physical living situation.

Health providers still stress the importance of immunizations, but they also want to delve into topics that are less traditional. Is a patient drinking too much, frequently smoking, experiencing weight gain, or going through a change in family circumstances? Another key issue is knowing more about a patient's family medical history.

So-called one-stop health centers, where a number of services are bundled together, greatly help improve treating the entire patient. A person can receive health care and wellness education in one building from several providers for a number of issues, from high blood pressure to low self-esteem.

It's a model that has proven rather successful, allowing providers to better treat the patient and even share information in real time, if necessary.

Of course, the changing face of health care can also include going to where the encounter occurs. For example, in rural places where it's difficult for people to get to care, tele-health communications put providers in touch with patients without them having to leave their communities.

Counseling is a medical service that sometimes goes unnoticed. People of all ages need help in treating maladies such as anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, substance abuse, weight management or stress.

Primary care providers can supply much-needed support in these areas that can be complemented by wellness education classes in nutrition and chronic pain management, among others.

In recent years, health care has focused on our growing senior population. But what about teens — what can we do for them?

Some providers offer great counseling services, addressing topics that teens don't want to discuss with their parents and discussing their overall decision-making processes.

Regardless of age, patients can receive the best care when there is a level of trust with their health care providers — and it's a two-way street to achieving better health together.

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