

Workshop 15: Sharing and Agreeing an Agenda

We can use agenda setting during our health care appointments to enable us to get the most from these meetings. Agenda setting is a tool we can use to help us to agree with any health professional the key issues which need to be discussed in this particular consultation. Some of these issues may be identified by the health professional, whilst others may be by ourselves.

Agenda setting during a health care appointment can help us feel in control and demonstrates to the health professional that having a role in managing our health is important to us.

What topics might we want to add to the agenda for our consultation?

- Medication
- My goals
- Side effects
- Results of tests
- New symptoms
- Further tests
- Getting pregnant
- Effect on a relationship
- How can I self-manage well?
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Eating
- Exercise
- Travel
- Employment/education
- New treatment options
- What the future holds
- What happens if...?
- Support available from others

It is important that the agenda is shared and agreed, so that both parties get their most important issues covered.



The following are two different conversations between a patient and their doctor:

Situation 1

GP: Hello Lesley, thanks for coming in to see me. I thought we might start by having a look at your medication. You are still taking Bupimide 5mgs every day?

Lesley: Yes that's right.

GP: You've been taking them for over 3 years now. Any trouble with them?

Lesley: Er.... I don't know really.... I don't think so.

GP: OK that's good. So you had some tests last month?

Lesley: Mmm.... was the result alright?

GP: Well, a little on the high side, but then that's not unusual for you.... very similar to the last one.

Lesley: Oh.... right

GP: Perhaps we had better do some more in 3 months just to keep an eye on it

Lesley: Oh dear.... I really don't like blood tests.

GP: Well that's fine then.... if you make an appointment to see me in 3 months once you've had your blood test taken?

Lesley: Oh right (gets up to leave) Erm.... by the way.... I've been thinking, doctor.... I'm finding working full-time really hard, I just get terribly tired....

Situation 2

GP: Thanks for coming in to see me Lesley, I'm hoping we can talk about your blood test results and your medication today, but before we do I wondered what thoughts you might have had about what you want to talk about.

Lesley: Well, I would like to know about my blood test results, but there are a couple of other things I would like to talk about too. I've been feeling terribly tired recently, so much so that I am wondering about reducing my working hours a bit. But.... also me and my partner are struggling financially and I'm not sure it's right to do so.

GP: OK, I can see that both of those are important to you, is there anything else you hoped to talk about today?

Lesley: Well, my sister wonders if the reason I'm so tired could just be because I'm carrying so much weight. I wanted to talk about that too really.

GP: OK, is there anything else you hoped to talk about today?

Lesley: No.... no.... I don't think so.

GP: So shall we start by talking about the tiredness and the extra weight that is bothering you, as these could be important when we look at your medication afterwards. How does that sound?

Sam: That would be ever so helpful, thank you.

In the first script the GP set the agenda without consulting the patient, and Sam didn't make it clear about what was important in the consultation. However, in the second, the agenda was agreed between them and Sam had also given some thought beforehand about what the consultation may cover.

How did the patient and the doctor benefit from this agenda-setting?

- Patient could voice concerns right from the start
- GP could manage the time
- Patient and clinician were equal in process
- Patient's feelings were valued
- More like a discussion, where ideas were shared
- More useful and relevant for both

To help us to take part in the agenda setting process we may need to give some thought beforehand to what we might wish to talk about.

We may want to use these questions to guide us:

What am I going to this meeting for and what do I hope to get from it?

How have I been feeling since my last visit?

What have I been finding difficult?

What else in my life might be affecting my health?

What have I been doing to look after my health?

Is there anything I might find difficult to talk about?

What is my goal?

There are times when both the health professional and the patient are not able to do justice to all issues in just one appointment. If this is the case you may need a follow-up appointment where other topics can be discussed.

If you decide to prepare beforehand for your meetings so that you can contribute to setting the agenda, it is likely to make your meetings with health professionals more helpful and satisfying and enable you to feel that you are working with them in a more equal way. It may be that your health professional is also taking part in similar training and will also be learning more about sharing and agreeing the agenda with patients.

Agenda setting is another tool which enables us to feel balanced and in control of our situation. Agreeing the agenda for a consultation helps us to become real partners in our health care. Many health professionals in the area are participating in training similar to this. Agenda setting is a new skill for us and it's also new for health care professionals.... and, like any new skill, they too may need to practise this.

Being a good self-manager always means we need to have a helpful understanding of our health condition. There are many questions you may want to ask. Here is a list of some that other people have come up with:

- **What are the tests for?**
- **How and when will I get the results?**
- **Who do I contact if I don't get the results?**
- **What will happen next?**
- **Who do I contact if things get worse?**
- **Where can I get more information or find a support group?**
- **What other ways are there to treat my condition?**
- **How long will the treatment last?**
- **What will happen if I don't have any treatment?**
- **Is there anything I should stop or avoid doing?**
- **What can I do to self-manage?**