

Becky's corner: Communicating with your provider

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At various times in our lives, we've all experienced the thought of: "Should I call my provider? I don't want to bother anyone."

Good communication between you and your provider is essential for good health. In these times of COVID-19, it's understandable that people feel reluctant to go to the office – but telehealth is a great option.

Another great option is using [MyChart](#) or another provider portal to communicate with your provider. If you don't have a patient portal, please check with your provider's office.

Often questions can be answered over-the-phone. In Salem Health Radiation Oncology, calls come to the nurses and they promptly return those calls. Nurses can help you problem-solve and can certainly get your provider updated.

Don't hesitate to speak-up. If something doesn't feel right, be your own best advocate. Frankly, it's better to call about nothing than to ignore a potentially serious situation. Don't be tempted to think that "It will go away."

Try not to minimize how you're feeling. Here's an example of effective patient-to-provider communication:

Patient: "For the past three days, I've been having burning with urination. The urine is darker and I'm having to go more frequently. I don't feel that I'm emptying my bladder at all. I'm not taking any new medications, herbs or vitamins. I haven't tried any over-the-counter medications. I'm trying to drink as much water as possible. I don't have a fever or chills. I had a urinary tract infection some years ago and this feels exactly the same."

Provider: "Let's have you stop by the lab and give a urine sample. I'll put the order in and call you with the results."

The beauty of the patient's communication in this example is that it's detailed and specific to the problem being discussed. It tells the provider exactly what's going on and for how long.

In keeping with feeling empowered to talk to your provider, also feel empowered to keep asking until you get an answer that you can understand.

Some suggestions include:

- Write down a list of your questions and concerns.
- Consider bringing a family member or close friend to the appointment.
- Take notes during the conversation with your provider.
- Consider using [MyChart](#).

- Get the provider's contact information and preferred method of communication.
- Remember that nurses and pharmacists can be great resources as well.
- If you have limited vision or hearing, let the provider know so accommodations can be made.
- If English isn't your first language, ask for an interpreter.
- Make your advanced directive or POLST form known to your provider.
- Make a medication list along with your allergies and any vitamins you are taking. Update the list as needed.
- Make sure your provider has your current insurance information.

If you're considering a new treatment, ask about the risks vs. the benefits. What are the side effects? What can you expect? How long is the treatment? How well does it work? Will it negatively affect my quality of life?

The relationship you have with your provider is so important. If you don't feel you have a good relationship, it's OK to ask for another provider. You must feel comfortable with your provider.

Take care and feel confident in your ability to communicate with your provider.