



## Contradictory Health Care Advice

There are many examples in the daily news of contradictory or conflicting health care advice. Recent stories of conflicting health care advice include silicone breast implants, pain medication (anti-inflammatory medication) and heart disease, use of hormone supplements for menopausal symptoms, and at what age are joint replacements appropriate.

There is a wide variety of sources of information on health and medical concerns available including the mainstream medical community, Chiropractic medicine, alternative medicine, coaches, internet, self improvement books/audio tapes, and friends/family. Having such an abundance of information can be helpful, but it also can create challenges for the individual who is making decisions regarding his/her health.

Often an individual will see more than one health care provider for a single problem, the physician, nurse, therapists, podiatrist, chiropractor, pharmacist, and others. The expectation is the various team members would all agree on the diagnosis and treatment plan, but more often than not the individual must decide between contradictory opinions. A reasonable expectation is that, if health care providers disagree on what a diagnosis is, or what the best treatment, that they communicate their opinions to other team members. Unfortunately, communication among team members does not always occur, and does not assure consensus of opinions.

As a Physical Therapist I have observed patients who express frustration when faced with conflicting advice. My recommendation is that the individual consult with their Primary Care Physician (PCP) for guidance. The PCP is trained and experienced at communicating with specialist, understanding complex medical diagnosis and treatments, and should be familiar with your history, concerns, and responses to treatments. Unfortunately, many individuals do not have an established relationship with a PCP especially if their health insurance plan does not require a referral from a PCP in order to see a specialist, or if they are generally healthy.

If you are a healthy individual who does not typically utilize the services of a PCP it is wise to be proactive and to develop and maintain a relationship with a PCP for the times you will need health care services or assistance in sorting out conflicting health care advice. Having access to an individual who is knowledgeable, and more importantly whom you have trust in is quite valuable. A yearly or biannual visit to your PCP for a "physical" facilitates development of a trusting relationship. Ask your PCP what is the best way to communicate with him/her, does he/her prefer an office visit, when is the best time to reach them by phone, is email communication acceptable? Consider whether you are comfortable having a relationship with a PCP group practice or whether you prefer having a relationship with a specific and consistent PCP.

Requirements that health care providers maintain your health records private and confidential may impede sharing information with your PCP. A simple request by you to any health care specialist that you see, that your PCP be kept informed of diagnostic tests and treatments will eliminate any impediment. Even if your PCP is not actively involved in the management of a health problem it is common sense for him to have a complete medical history available at one source/location.

The opinion expressed above is that of a health care consumer, who is also a health care provider who is considered a specialist. As a health care provider who is considered a specialist I truly value having access to PCP, they facilitate and coordinate management of complex patient problems. I admire the talent required to be a generalist.