

Does Your Doc Need a Checkup?

Put too much faith in the white coat, and you might miss a red flag. Here are five secrets doctors keep.



Watch Out for Greasy Palms

More than 70 percent of doctors report that they've accepted gifts from a drug or medical company, a study from the Mongan Institute for Health Policy found.

TALK IT THROUGH Ask for an explanation of your options before you accept a treatment, says Pamela F. Gallin, M.D., author of *How to Survive Your Doctor's Care*. If the doctor likes a costly brand-name drug, ask why. Then go to projects.propublica.org/docdollars to see if he or she has taken pharmaceutical money.



Make Sure the Doc Hears You

Diagnostic errors can cause up to 160,000 deaths or cases of permanent injury a year in the United States, according to research published in the journal *BMJ Quality & Safety*. One reason? According to a study published in *JAMA*, you have a mere 23 seconds to speak before your doctor redirects the conversation.

SKIP THE SMALL TALK Start like this: "I have three things I'd like to discuss with you today," suggests Howard B. Beckman, M.D., coauthor of the *JAMA* study.



Don't Take a Drug You Don't Need

Prescription numbers have jumped 39 percent from 1999 to 2009, the Kaiser Family Foundation reports. For example, over a 15-year period, sleeping pill scrips grew 21 times faster than sleeplessness complaints did.

ADDRESS THE CAUSE "Many doctors just assume you want a prescription," says Leana Wen, M.D., coauthor of *When Doctors Don't Listen*. So explain that you would rather understand your diagnosis first so you can address the underlying cause.



Be on the Lookout for Prejudices

Research shows that doctors often have subconscious racial biases, and a 2013 study in *Obesity* found that they tend to build less emotional rapport with their overweight patients. That can diminish the quality of treatment; plus, according to Michigan State University research, people who feel rapport with their doc may feel less pain.

DROP A RUDE DOC Book your next appointment elsewhere. If the disrespect was severe, file a report with your state's medical board.



Ask Outright for the Whole Truth

More than half of doctors say they sugarcoat health predictions, a *Health Affairs* study reveals. And 11 percent admit to lying to patients in the past year.

GET IT STRAIGHT Tell your doc to give you the real lowdown. And before you go in, search your symptoms on reputable sites, such as cdc.gov (as opposed to randomly typing symptoms into Google), to put your b.s. meter on high alert, says Richard Klein, M.D., author of *Surviving Your Doctors*. —K. ALEISHA FETTERS

How Do I Find a New M.D.?

First, ask friends, family, or coworkers, says Kimberly Gudzone, M.D., M.P.H., an assistant professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University. If your colleagues are in your network and are happy with their doctors, then you may be too. Or try a teaching hospital. Many great doctors have side gigs teaching at med schools, so they can provide easy access to the latest treatments. Whatever you do, don't rely solely on recommendations from your insurer. "Those are the physicians who are probably cutting costs for insurers by cutting your care," Dr. Klein says.