

Assertiveness in the Dr.'s Office

The following information is meant for women going to clinics or private doctor's offices in order to assert your rights as a consumer of health services. These suggestions also provide us with defenses against the sort of professionalism which prevents us from having access to information about our own bodies as well as control over our lives. These defenses are not a permanent solution, but measures to be used until women regain full control of the field of women's medicine.

1. All people have a legal right to read their own medical charts and records. You may also ask for a copy of your records.
2. You have a right to full and complete explanation to all examinations, treatments, medications, (including risks, side effects, proven effectiveness, experimental nature), etc.
3. It is often a good idea to call a clinic or physician's office before your actual visit and ask some key questions: costs of various procedures, office routines, billing and insurance collection, if Medi-Cal is accepted, etc.
4. If you are addressed by your first name by office personnel (including the doctor) you should feel free to relate to them on a first name basis also.
5. Married women have full rights to any and all medical treatment without the consent of their spouse (this includes abortion, v.d. treatment, sterilization).
6. Single women who are legal minors (under 18 years of age) are eligible for Medi-Cal for full payment of the cost of an abortion. This can be done without parental consent of knowledge.
7. A woman does not have to be a certain age or have a certain number of children in order to have an elective sterilization procedure.
8. You have a right to read all literature accompanying any medication you are given. This often gives more complete information about the drug or device, the possible side effects and contra-indications (reasons some people should not take the drug. Sometimes this information is given to the doctor or pharmacist along with the medication, sometime information is given in a medical reference book called the Physician's Desk Reference. You might be interested in asking to see the book or literature.
9. You have an absolute right to have all of your questions answered to the best of the ability of the physician or health workers.
10. If you were referred by a women's center, women's group or friends you should mention that. A Dr. may be more "on guard" to be on good behavior of he/she knows that more business may be gained or lost through your report back to the original referral group.
11. TAKE A FRIEND WITH YOU. It always helps to have the support of a friend to serve as a patient advocate.
12. When you meet the doctor for the first time, shake hands and greet him/her. Any indication that you are intending to be an ACTIVE participant in the visit will help in breaking the tradition of the patient as a mere object.
13. Try to learn as much basic information about your own body as you can. The more familiar you are with the anatomy and functioning of your body, the more able to assert yourself you will be.