



# Health Concerns

## Working effectively with your health service providers

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### Choosing your HIV health service provider

HIV medical care is very complicated. There are different challenges and choices to be considered at every stage of the disease. There is a lot of new information and treatments are changing frequently. It is therefore very important that you have a health service provider(s) that you can trust and work well with to deal with these challenges together.

Your health service providers can include a primary care doctor (family doctor or general practitioner), an HIV infectious disease specialist, a nurse or nurse practitioner, a physician assistant and/or pharmacist.

Different health service providers may have different communication styles, different approaches to treating HIV, and different beliefs and attitudes toward complementary therapies or experimental treatments.

In choosing your health service provider(s), it is important to look for people who:

- are knowledgeable and experienced in treating HIV/AIDS
- are willing to listen to your concerns
- respond to your questions/concerns in an open, clear and sensitive manner
- provide you with information and options
- share similar attitudes and beliefs as you in approaching HIV care
- support and respect the choices you make in your own health care
- are available or accessible when you need them

### Getting the most out of your medical appointments

Establishing an effective working relationship with your health service provider(s) is critical to your health. To be an effective patient, you will need to be actively involved in your own care. Since most health service providers work on a very tight schedule, time for your medical appointments is usually very limited. In order for you to make the most effective use of your medical appointment, it would help to be prepared ahead of time.

Before your medical appointment, you can prepare by:

- keeping notes of your condition
- writing down your questions
- prioritizing your questions
- researching your own information

During the appointment, you can help the communication by:

- bringing your notes that you prepared, along with your sources of information
- showing your health service provider(s) information you keep about your health
- raising your questions and concerns at the beginning of the session



- making sure that you understand the answers. Take notes if you need to, and ask again if you do not understand. It may help to bring along a friend or family member.
- asking for written materials or resources that you can take home with you

### **What to do if you are unhappy with your health service provider**

During the course of your relationship, it is quite possible that there may be conflicts, communication challenges or times when you and your health service provider do not agree with each other. It is also possible that you may feel that your health service provider has treated you insensitively or gave you wrong information or advice.

It is important to remember that there are different options for managing such situations.

Understanding your rights as a patient

- You have a right to be treated in a sensitive and respectful manner by your health service provider.
- You have a right to confidentiality and privacy to your own information.
- You have a right to raise questions and have questions answered to your satisfaction on any treatments that your health service provider offers you.
- You have a right to an explanation if something has gone wrong in your care.
- If you feel that you have been treated in a negligent manner or that your right as a patient has been violated, you have a right to file a complaint with the appropriate health service management or professional regulatory bodies.
- You have a right to change health service providers.

### **Dealing with conflict**

If you become unhappy over a disagreement with your health service provider, you have the right to raise your concerns directly with the provider. It is often helpful to try to first communicate your concerns directly with the person you have conflicts with before involving a third party. It is also usually more helpful for resolving problems or misunderstandings if you can give specific information or examples.

However, if you feel uncomfortable raising questions or concerns directly with your health service provider, you may choose to invite someone else to be present as your support or advocate. You may invite a friend, family member, or volunteer or support worker from an AIDS service organization. Or you may ask if your health service provider has a “patient advocate” you can access for assistance.

If you cannot resolve your concerns or conflicts with your health service provider, you may need to look for a different health service provider who can work more effectively with you.

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