

Dr. Melanie Manary Explains

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If you've been to the doctor lately, you have probably heard the phrase Patient Centered Care, because the philosophy behind it is shaping the doctor-patient relationship today. But what does Patient Centered Care mean exactly, and what are the benefits to the patient? We asked Dr. Melanie Manary, M.D., of Internal Medicine of Northern Michigan, to explain the approach, because she and her partners have woven the Patient Centered Care ethos into their practice for a number of years now.

First, we are hearing a lot about Patient Centered Care and Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH), can you clarify their relationship?

Patient Centered Care means you have a primary physician, somebody who takes the lead in coordinating the team of people who are involved in your care. A Patient Centered Medical Home is an insurance term—insurance companies evaluate physician practice services to be sure that care quality and standards qualify as a PCMH for that particular insurance company.

What are the key pieces of the Patient Centered Care philosophy and process?

Well, as I say, first, you have a primary physician who coordinates the team. That team consists of every person involved in your health care, like the medical assistant, the person tracking your immunizations, a nutritionist, your cardiologist ... could be a lot of different people on the team. Also, we are looking at the whole person, taking into account all



that's going on with them. So maybe I notice that their blood pressure is high, but then I learn their house burned down a month ago, and now they can't afford the blood pressure medicine. We try to help address the entire situation.

Explain how the coordination—the quarterbacking that the primary physician does—results in better care.

Let's say you go to the physical therapist and the physical therapist feels you need more leg strength. The physical therapist then sends to the primary physician. And you also see a visiting nurse who explains that you need to get out of the house more. We look at those recommendations and suggest you join a group that goes on walks. So all the elements of your care feed back to your primary physician, and we can coordinate it all, determine what else might be

needed, and also eliminate duplicate care. Health care used to be very fragmented. Patient Centered Care hopes to solve that problem.

We hear that over-prescribing medications is a problem these days. Does it help with that?

One of the best things is that our electronic medication records are always up to date. If any provider related to my patient's care prescribes a medication, I get a list. When a patient comes in and says, 'that blue pill ...' and I don't know which blue pill they mean, but now I refer to the electronic medication list. This way, we avoid patients being double-dosed. That has helped out hugely. The pharmacies are involved too. If a patient hasn't filled a prescription they need, I get a note.

How have the patients reacted to the Patient Centered Care approach?

We'd hope our holistic approach encourages the patient to look at themselves more holistically as well.

Any piece of advice for people just getting used to Patient Centered Care?

Don't pooh-pooh the portal! The web portal [online access to your medical records] makes it very easy to communicate with your primary physician. You can look at labs and see notes to help you remember your own care. We might talk about 18 things during an appointment, and when you get home you might think, now what did she say about allergies? Now, you can look on the portal. It helps patients stay healthy!—J.S.