

# How to get the best from your health professional

Fact Sheet

12

updated September 2010

The relationship you have with your health professional is very important. And while some people may think they just need to follow along with what their health professional suggests, you may find you are better prepared for health treatment if you understand how you can get the best treatment possible.

To get the best from your health professional it helps to:

- Know the medical resources and referral system
- Know your rights
- Know your responsibilities

## Medical Resources and Referral System

There are a number of medical resources available to you:

### General practitioner, who provides:

- Your first consultation
- Physical examinations
- Some preliminary investigations into your health issues
- Referral to specialists for deeper investigations into your health issues

### Private specialists (such as gynaecologists, endocrinologists and urologists) who provide:

Investigations and treatment for infertility (although they require a referral from a GP or FPA doctor).

### Your local Family Planning Association (check your local telephone directory for details) who provide:

- Your first consultation
- Physical examinations
- Some preliminary investigations into your health issues
- Referral to specialists for deeper investigations into your health issues
- On-going counselling.

## Your Rights

- You have a right to be treated in a humane manner with care, consideration and dignity.
- You should be given a clear, concise explanation in non-medical terms of your problem.
- You should be given a clear, concise explanation of any treatment or investigation including whether such treatment is of an experimental nature.
- You have the right to have your partner with you in the consulting room.
- You are entitled to refuse - an examination, a particular treatment or an operation. You have the right to ask for

a second opinion. i.e. to see another doctor. Ask the specialist you are seeing or ask your general practitioner to refer you to another specialist.

••• You have the right to see your medical file, but you cannot take it away. You can nominate a doctor (usually your general practitioner) to obtain all your medical records and to inform you of what they contain.

## Your Responsibilities

••• Be assertive. Ask, insist, tell, confront, book, change, refuse, persist, understand, question.

••• Be well informed. Join a self-help group and read literature.

••• Join a private health fund. This enables choice of a specialist and treatment and allays costs in the long term.

••• Keep your own record of all tests, results and treatments.

••• Make a list of questions, before your appointment, and write down the answers. If you wish to tape the interview, ask for permission.

••• Book a long appointment if you feel you need more time with the doctor.

••• Inform the doctor or his receptionist if you are unable to attend a consultation.

••• Take your partner with you to the doctor. It can be mutually beneficial for both of you.

••• Defer any treatment if you are unsure about it but be mindful that for women fertility declines with age.

••• Have reasonable expectations about your health professional. Understand that s/he may be tired, rushed or unwell.

••• If you cannot communicate with your doctor, it is in your interests to find someone with whom you can talk.

••• If you are dissatisfied with your treatment, try to discuss this with the doctor.

••• If you need to speak to the doctor, ring the surgery, leave your name, phone number and message, rather than interrupt him/her during consultations.

••• If you have unexplained infertility and all investigations and treatments have been tried, you may like to return to your doctor every two years to check on new developments in infertility treatment that may help you.

With thanks to Dr Sue Craig.