

DrG's Opinion
By Ann Gerhardt MD
May 2023

**RE: Getting the most out of the medical system –
Dispense with unhelpful providers**

**Bottom line at the top in a cynical limerick:
Roses are red
Healthcare is blue
when you can't depend
on doctors helping you**

2022 was a horrible year for me, in which I received disappointing so-called doctoring by three doctors who made incorrect diagnoses, ignored my symptoms and history, lied to me and/or committed fraud. I fired them and switched doctors, but not without losing sleep, enduring a delayed recovery and wasting a lot of time.

Family and friends were surprised that a doctor, me, couldn't get competent and compassionate care. The whole year made me acutely aware of how hard it is for super-annuated (old) people to navigate the medical system. Old people in the medical system are much like babies, in that they don't have the agency, autonomy and ability to recognize and object to bad so-called care.

This wasn't the first time I had dealt with arrogant, narcissistic physicians who ignore what patients say and believe their own erroneous conclusions to the point of causing harm to their patients. My son almost died in infancy because of one and I lost much of my left eye vision because of another. In the case of my son, an intern overturned the famous attending's plan to let him die, then did some simple tests and consulted another doctor who then saved his life. In the case of my eye, I found an out-of-town specialist who kept working on a diagnosis until he made the correct one. In each case I was fortunate to have non-restrictive health insurance which allowed me to self-refer and didn't limit me to the bad doctors' medical group partners, which is what happens with HMOs and insurance plans with closed doctor panels.

Firing doctors is easy – Just cancel or don't make follow-up appointments. Then burst the offending

doctor's ego bubble with a letter detailing their offense(s). For patients who have non-restrictive insurance, I suggest researching on-line reviews of providers, remembering that the best aren't necessarily the most famous, then self-refer or demand referral to the best you can find. You'll then likely have to appeal insurance denials. That process works better if the new doctor makes a correct diagnosis and you recover, proving that you were right to change course.

I resent my bad doctors, who caused me sleepless nights and wasted time, but I've not been shy about seeking out good doctors, who would provide the effort and care that most doctors would expect to receive (Do unto others as you.... I asked them to start the evaluation and treatment process over, rather than being biased by prior doctors' erroneous medical records, since medical personnel often believe computer records more than what a patient says. You can counter error-filled electronic medical records by keeping detailed notes of medical visits and calls.

Unfortunately, doctors are human, with biases and faults just like everyone else. Perhaps medical training should spend more time on ethics and honesty, and patients should have the freedom to find doctors who are kind, competent and helpful. Ideal goals are nice but hard to achieve when the problem individuals have no intention of changing.