

Enlisting Your Doctor's Help

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This essay is written to provide consumers with some ideas how to successfully enlist their doctors to secure a medication stockpile for use during the pandemic. Drugs that need to be stockpiled include those taken regularly for chronic medical disorders and those for treatment pandemic influenza.

These days being a doctor is not much fun

Being a doctor today is hard, especially for Pediatricians, Family Practitioners and Internists, the disciplines that provide the bulk of primary care in the US. The demands placed upon them are rising while their pay is falling. Many are burned out, frustrated, and depressed. Not a few are leaving practice early due to stress and fewer of the best and brightest students graduating from college today choose a career in medicine. There are many reasons for why medical practice has changed so much in the past decade but they are not the subjects of this article. I mention them only to provide you with some insight into why the experience many patients have today with their doctors are not as satisfying as it was in the past.

Frankly, doctors are not in the mood to deal with the pandemic issue. At work they pressed for time. Patients today are very demanding and have access to considerably more information than ever before. Doctors are bombarded with patient requests for drugs seen advertised on TV or in magazines. Patients seeking to use an unproven alternative herbal or “natural”

treatment for their serious medical disorders instead of the proven conventional drug treatment is a recurring headache. As they say, a little knowledge can be dangerous, especially when it comes to the practice of medicine. These encounters have made doctors skeptical of anything brought to them by the patient.

The fact is most doctors simply don't appreciate the gravity of the risk we face from pandemic influenza. Almost all the doctors who practiced during the last important pandemic in 1957 have retired or are dead. The only people alive today who survived the 1918 pandemic were children at the time and not many of them recall much about the event. In medical school, little is taught about pandemics although there is a good bit of time given to seasonal flu and the value of annual flu vaccination.

Those of you who have really studied this issue probably know more about influenza history, virology and genetics than the average primary care doctor. While the seasoned doctor realizes that virtually everything they know about the practice of medicine is learned from the care of patients, few of us think that our patients are a reliable source of medical education. These factors are some of the reasons most patients have been frustrated in their efforts to obtain their doctor's help to prepare for the pandemic.

Put yourself in your doctor's shoes

Having set the stage as above, imagine you are the doctor and know virtually nothing about the coming pandemic. You walk in the exam room to see a patient and to your surprise discover the reason for the visit is to secure a handful of prescription drugs

for treatment of bird flu in the event it becomes pandemic. You think to yourself where did my patient get this crazy idea?

The logical thing for most to do is refuse to help you without further discussion. Some doctors may refuse based upon an editorial or position paper they scanned in the medical journals opposing personal stockpiling. Maybe they just don't want to write 6 prescriptions because of the time it takes to do it. They might object because it was not their idea to use these drugs for flu and they don't want to take the responsibility for your misusing them. Maybe they think you are unnecessarily worried about bird flu and have been misled into seeking these drugs that you will never need. As you can see, helping your doctor to see the issue as we do is not going to be an easy task.

An uphill battle

By understanding your doctor's frame of mind and the conditions he or she is working in today is an important first step in obtaining your goal. From this prospective, you will be better equipped to plan an effective strategy. It should be obvious from the foregoing that a direct frontal approach is not likely to succeed. Nor are you likely to have your request fulfilled quickly if your doctor is predisposed against stockpiling. It is going to take time, patience, and persistence to educate the doctor. Here's how.

Don't be pushy

If you argue with the doctor about this you are sure to lose. Not because you are wrong but because most doctors are not able to

admit that you could be right and them wrong about something medical. Their egos just will not permit it. So, don't go there.

Be polite and respectful

Behaving in any other way will get you nowhere. It will also prevent the doctor from being able to give you a fair hearing when you are speaking to him or her about this issue.

Easy does it

Go slow. Doctors are only able to absorb one or two pertinent facts at each encounter. Don't place the whole opus before them at once and expect he or she to get it. You won't get very far along in the 5 minutes they give you these days anyway for an office visit. Write down your arguments for why helping you establish a stockpile is reasonable. Boil it down to the core elements of the argument. When given the opportunity to speak make no more than one or two of these key points at any one encounter with the doctor.

Provide them with information but not too much

Most doctors have stopped educating themselves because today's work stress and frustration leave them too tired to do much at the end of the day. Patients often give us things they cut out from the newspaper or downloaded from the Internet touting this or that idea or alternative treatment. The common response is to accept the proffered material and as soon as we can after leaving the exam room deposit it into the nearest waste can. Doctors think, "Hell, I don't have time to read this 3 foot

high pile of medical journals that have really important new information that could help me practice medicine better. Where would I ever find the time to read some off the wall BS about pandemic flu given to me by a patient?" Please don't take offense; my purpose is not to insult you but to give you an inside look at the typical doctor's frame of mind these days.

The point I am trying to make is to give the doctor no more than one thing to read at a time. The chances or them of reading them are low but some might. My essays have hooks designed to get their attention. Most won't even take a look at it. So, don't be surprised if your doctor doesn't.

The bird flu is not going away so be persistent

Unfortunately, this story is not going away. If it does, that would be great but it is probably not going to. As the virus adapts to humankind the number of cases, deaths, and the geographic reach will all increase. During the ante-pandemic phases (4 and 5) this increase will be linear but still pretty impressive. At some point it will be obvious to doctors that the virus is not going away and its activity is increasing. There will be more articles in the medical and lay press that support the case that a pandemic is coming. There will be counter arguments too. What will be undeniable though is the growing number of cases and increased pace of the human infections compared with the past. Seeing this is the time when many doctors are going to begin to see the risk more clearly. It will be an opportune time to ask for their help with your stockpile.

Doctor's have their patient's best interests at heart

It is OK to bend the rule when it comes to a life and death issues.

Chances are there will be some doctors who will never come around. Unusual measures might be needed. If you have a chance to travel overseas to a country that allows people to buy the drugs you need without a prescription, go for it. You might have a friend that lives in one of these countries or who is planning to visit one. Ask them to help you out by buying the drugs there and mailing them too you. Some people have had success buying these drugs over the Internet from an offshore pharmacy without a prescription. This is a risky proposition and not one I prefer.

Canadian Internet Pharmacies

I have purchased drugs from Canadian Internet Pharmacies and they have always required a prescription and even called the doctor's office to verify that they really wrote it. The drugs provided were manufactured in a variety of countries outside the US. They were just as good as the drugs purchased in my local US drug store. Obtaining drugs from pharmacies that don't require a physician prescription is risky. These Internet providers are those that sell counterfeit drugs.

The very best option is to enlist your doctor's assistance. This means being patient and persistent. Keep your cool. The advice provided here is crafted to help you understand your doctor better. Doing so improves but does not guarantee your quest

will succeed. Don't give up on your doctor. He or she remains your best bet for obtaining a prescription for the drugs you and your family needs to survive the pandemic.