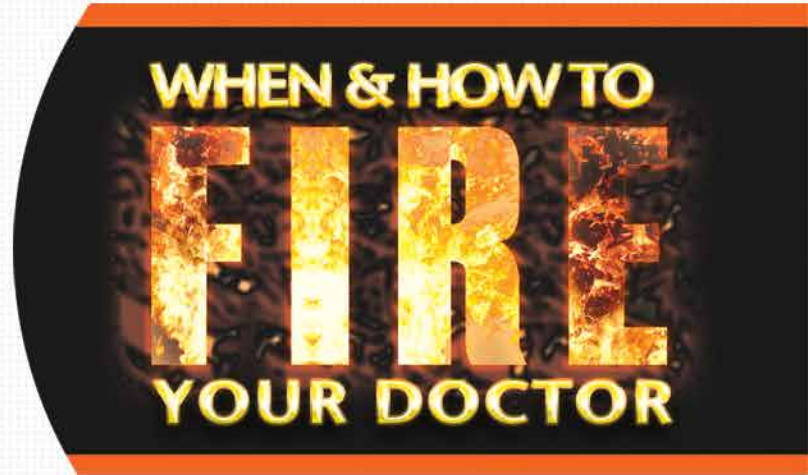


5

PRESCRIPTIONS YOU
WON'T FIND IN YOUR
DOCTOR'S BAG 

Vol. 05



Myrtle Potter

Your Trusted Voice in Healthcare™

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INTRODUCTION



When I was 46 years old, I almost died. I lay in a hospital bed with my skin peeling off my body, my lungs and liver failing and my kidneys in total shutdown. I knew in my heart at that moment the decision I had made two weeks earlier to fire my doctor was the smartest thing I could have ever done. He was in over his head and was as mystified about my rapidly declining health status as I was. I knew that my new doctors at the university teaching hospital would be the ones to save me if it wasn't already too late. As it turned out, I soon realized that firing my doctor saved my life. I believe the action of changing doctors is one of the main reasons I am alive today. It's not that my physician was necessarily a bad doctor. I just knew that the treatments he prescribed were not working, and he did not have the skills or experience to find me a cure.

I am very grateful that my prior years in the healthcare industry provided me with the knowledge to recognize when I needed to fire my doctor, and how to quickly find a new one. I am writing this eBook to share with you what I have learned in the hopes that you too will have the tools to not only recognize when it is time to make a change, but to effect a change when needed.

You don't need to be in a near-death situation before you decide you need to end your relationship with your doctor. The doctor-patient partnership is important to your health at any level of care, whether it be your primary care physician, family practitioner or specialist. And your relationship with your doctor is a very dynamic one. No two visits to the doctor are exactly alike, and certainly as you and your family members grow older, your needs will change.

Managing your healthcare relationships is more important than ever. Taking charge of your care and being a knowledgeable, responsible consumer sits squarely on your shoulders. I know, it can feel a little (or very) overwhelming, but I am here to help you.

With the information you find in this eBook, my hope is that you will begin to feel more confident and comfortable with the title of "Boss" of your own healthcare. As the boss, one of the most important management decisions you will make is who to hire as your doctor and when to let a doctor go. So Let's get started with *5 Prescriptions You Won't Find in Your Doctor's Bag: When and How to Fire Your Doctor*.

➤ *Managing your healthcare relationships is more important than ever.*





Prescription 1

Know Who's the Boss

1

Many of us routinely stop using a service if we repeatedly receive unsatisfactory results. If your hair is cut poorly, you look for another hairdresser. If your plumber never fixed the leak or worse yet, caused more damage, you end your relationship and maybe even ask for a refund.

But when it comes to something as important as our health, we are reluctant to wear the title of boss. Even high-powered executives turn meek in the presence of a physician. So time and time again, patients put up with poor service and unsatisfactory results rather than speak up to their doctors.

Doctors can achieve seemingly miraculous results, and most of the time, they do very well by their patients. But physicians are not immune from making mistakes or having blind spots. For some doctors, such errors and oversights are very few and far between. For others, mishaps are ongoing.

Staying with a doctor who is not meeting your needs can have far-reaching consequences on your health, and sometimes on your wallet. Still patients are often reluctant to fire doctors.

Here are some of the reasons why:

The doctor is always right. Right? So many of us stand in awe of our doctors, and often for very good reason: doctors have been through very rigorous training, and in most cases are extremely knowledgeable and passionate about their profession. But as unsettling as it is to hear, doctors are not always right, and you may have one who is less than perfect.

Fear of the unknown. Some patients stay with a doctor even when they are unhappy because change feels scary. You're not alone if you feel this way; leaving one doctor and starting up with a new one can be difficult. But no matter why you are hesitant to find a new doctor, when you and your physician are not on the same page, you are the one who pays the price.



➤ *Time and time again, patients put up with poor service and unsatisfactory results rather than speak up to their doctors.*





Prescription 2

How to Know When It's Time to Go

You've probably heard the old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." In other words, if you have a good relationship with your doctor, and you are getting the results you desire, don't go looking for problems. If this is the case, you should certainly take the time to let your doctor know you appreciate his or her services. But if you fall into the category of the "unsatisfied consumer," then you need to make some tough decisions.

Many patients simply don't know whether they have valid reasons for changing doctors. The doctor-patient relationship is a very important one, and hopefully a partnership that will last as long as you desire. But if you find yourself agreeing with one or more of the following reasons, you should consider changing doctors:

Can you hear me now? One of the most common reasons patients want to part ways with their doctors comes down to communication. Many patients say that feeling like they can talk and their doctor actually listens outweighs a doctor's clinical skills, or unhappiness with the doctor's referrals.

McDoctor. Do you feel your doctor rushes through your exam to get to the next patient? Is visiting your doctor not unlike the experience of going to a fast food restaurant, complete with long lines, brief interaction and incomplete results? I recall once starting to ask my doctor a question, and before I had finished my inquiry, the doctor had already left the exam room. This is not what you deserve for your care.

You say "tomato," I say "tomahto." Doctors are not one-type-fits-all, and even with the best of intentions, personality clashes do happen. But it doesn't mean

you are a bad patient, or she a bad doctor. If you rub each other the wrong way, it could just be incompatible styles. One person may find a physician's quiet, kindly approach patronizing and prefer a no-fuss, to-the-point presentation, while the next patient may feel exactly the opposite. Certainly we should all be tolerant of different personalities, but if you find that you and your doctor are so different that it interferes with your care, you should consider saying goodbye.

Say what? Does your doctor rattle off a lot of medical jargon that leaves you more confused than confident about your condition? A good doctor should be able to describe your condition and recommend a course of action in terms that you can understand.

Hurry up and wait. Most of us make a concerted effort to arrive on time for a doctor's appointment. Do you find that you have to wait an undue amount of time to actually be seen? I for one found extended waiting time was beginning to affect my care. As a working mom, I would schedule an appointment allowing for an acceptable amount of wait time.

But when I was finally seen by my physician, it was I who wanted to rush through the exam because I was going to be so late for the next responsibility in my schedule! Even if you have extreme patience, a doctor's office that consistently runs behind may be signaling that more than punctuality is being ignored.

Hint: Try to get the earliest appointment in the day or the first slot after lunch. You'll have a better chance to avoid a back-up of patients and spend less time waiting.





Prescription 2

How to Know When It's Time to Go

2

My way or the highway. Have you received push-back from your doctor when informing her you were interested in getting a second opinion? You should feel supported by your doctor when you feel the need to seek more information on your condition. You should also feel comfortable about asking questions of your doctor. A doctor who makes you feel bad about asking questions or seeking a second opinion may actually be having second thoughts about her own performance.

Patients are people too. In my first eBook, *The Best Medicine: 5 Prescriptions You Won't Find in Your Doctor's Bag*, I advised, "Get the best doctor, not the nicest doctor." Yes, there are times when you can, and should, overlook your doctor's less than perfect bedside manner if you believe that you are getting the best possible care. But if you find that your doctor is consistently rude or condescending, it may be time to move on. If she continues to be disrespectful, then definitely move on. If you feel your doctor asks inappropriate personal questions or makes you feel uncomfortable, even if you can't quite put your feelings about it into words, find a new doctor.

Got up on the wrong side of the office. OK, you know your doctor's receptionist or office manager isn't the person prescribing your treatment. Even so, this person can have an effect on your health. The office staff is responsible for keeping track of important information about you: your insurance submissions, medical records and appointments, as well as keeping your files private. A rude, uncommunicative annoyed staff member can certainly make an already anxious patient feel even worse. So if you feel your doctor's

staff is consistently "getting up on the wrong side of the office," consider looking for care elsewhere.

Repeat after me: this isn't working. When your doctor prescribes a treatment plan, it is up to you to follow the directives and give feedback to your doctor. If the treatment is working, great! But if your doctor continues with the same course of treatment again and again and it just isn't working, you should find another physician.

Out of his league. You should feel confident in your doctor's ability to treat your condition. If your doctor's plan (that you have followed) is not yielding the results you had hoped for, perhaps he lacks the skills to conquer your condition. In my introduction to this eBook, I told you I believe that firing the doctor who was out of his league – and quickly finding a new one – saved my life. Hopefully, you will never find yourself in a similar crisis situation. But if you do find yourself seriously questioning your doctor's ability, no matter your condition, you need to find a different doctor.

Strange, I actually feel worse. Here's where you need to trust your gut. If you often feel worse when you leave your doctor's office, even if you can't put your finger on the exact reason why, then there is something wrong. Remember: you are the consumer and your doctor is the supplier. If something is just not sitting well with you, that is a valid reason to seek new care.





Prescription 3

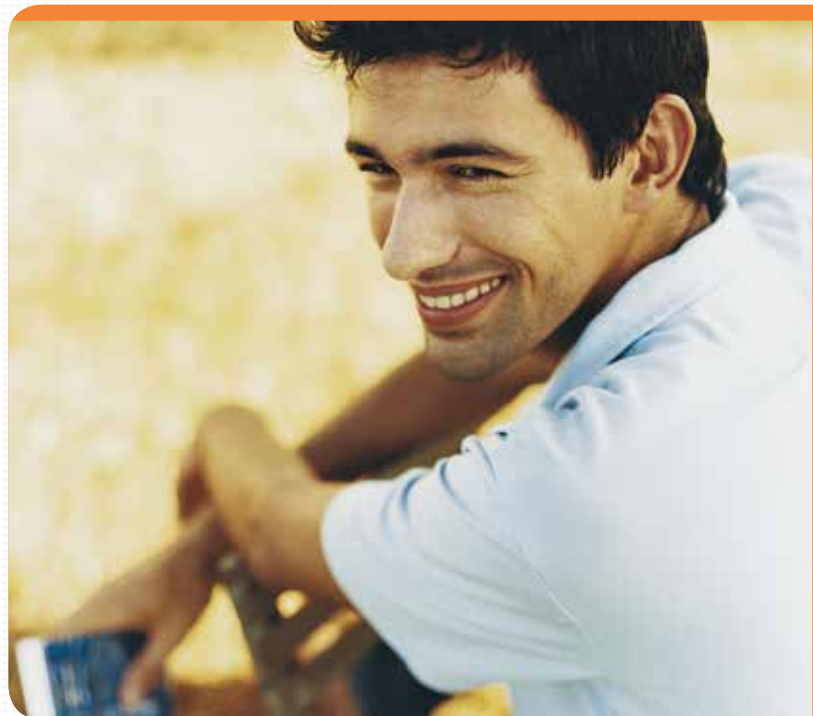
Ask Yourself: Are You a Good Boss?

If you have read any of my prior eBooks, then you know I have run billion-dollar companies, some with tens of thousands of employees. When doing so, I would constantly ask myself, “Am I giving my people everything they need to perform at their best?” I am now suggesting you ask yourself the same question before you fire your doctor. Yes, your doctor should be the leader of your medical care, but you are the true boss of your healthcare. For the doctor-patient relationship to really work at its best, you need to hold yourself to the same standards of excellence you expect from your physician. After you answer the following questions, decide if you are a good boss:

Do you come prepared to your appointments? This means bringing your medical history and a list of all your medications, including the dosage strength and how often you are taking them. Are you clear in your mind why you came to see your doctor, so you can use your limited time together efficiently?

If needed, do you bring a friend? Being ill can affect your ability to process information. If you have a hard time digesting what the doctor prescribes or are anxious about asking questions, do you bring a friend or family member to help you?

Are you a punctual patient? If you do not arrive on time, you can hardly fault your doctor for being behind schedule. Consider that your tardiness may affect the rest of your doctor’s patients, who end up paying the price for your doctor falling behind because you are late.



➤ *For the doctor-patient relationship to really work at its best, you need to hold yourself to the same standards of excellence you expect from your physician.*





Prescription 3

Ask Yourself: Are You a Good Boss? (continued)

3

Do you communicate clearly? Do you succinctly tell your doctor why you are seeking treatment? Do you create a record of when your symptoms started and share this document with your doctor? Do you think about the questions you want to ask, or better yet write these questions down so you won't forget? Do you listen as well to your doctor as you expect him to listen to you?

Are you truthful? Are you honest when you fill out your medical history, or do you hold back information that you feel might be embarrassing? Do you answer your doctor's questions truthfully? If you are not completely forthcoming about your situation, you cannot expect your doctor to effectively treat you.


Do you make your feelings known? If something bothers you, whether it is about your doctor's prescribed care, her mannerisms or office staff, you need to speak up. I have yet to meet a doctor who is also a mind reader. If you don't make your feelings known, your doctor can hardly improve her performance.



Are you polite to office staff and your doctor? Even if your doctor doesn't have the best bedside manner, you should still be polite and respectful, and perhaps your attitude will rub off on others. Now wouldn't that be a great result?

Do you follow your doctor's treatment plan? Your doctor hopefully created a course of treatment to help you on the road to better health. But if you do not comply with instructions, he will neither be able to determine if it was a good plan, nor suggest a better one. If you do not agree with your doctor's directives, then speak up. You want your doctor to respect you, and you should return the courtesy by following his advice.

OK boss, how did you do? Use what you have learned from these questions to become the best possible boss of your healthcare plan.

 *I have yet to meet a doctor who is also a mind reader. If you don't make your feelings known, your doctor can hardly improve her performance.*





Prescription 4

Know the Right Way to Part Ways with Your Doctor

4

Changing doctors is, and should be, a big decision. So take a deep breath and ask yourself: are you making a thoughtful choice? Firing a doctor is not something that should be done spur-of-the-moment, or out of anger. But if you have weighed all of your options and decided that the best option is to break up with your doctor, then that is what you should do.

If you have decided to leave your doctor, then I suggest you take the following steps to make your transition from one care provider to another as smooth as possible:

Have a new doctor chosen. Before you fire your current doctor, identify and select a new doctor, especially if you need a specialist. You may find that the doctor of your choice is no longer accepting new patients, or that there is a long wait for an appointment. You want to avoid finding yourself without any care. I will go into more detail on how to find a new doctor in Prescription 5.

Fire your doctor in writing. It is your choice whether you prefer to tell your doctor why you will no longer be using her services. But whether you choose to or not, I strongly recommend you notify your doctor in writing. The letter can be simple, just stating that you are going to change doctors and noting the effective date of the change. This letter will then become part of your medical records. If it is a specialist you are firing, then you should also send a copy of the letter to your primary care physician or

referring doctor. You may additionally want to provide your health insurance company with a copy of your correspondence, especially if your insurer requires you to specify a primary care physician.

Request your medical records. In the letter you send to the doctor you are firing, you should request that a copy of your medical records be sent to your new doctor. This means you should include the new doctor's contact information, and the range of dates for which you are requesting records. Due to privacy laws called HIPAA (The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) that have been established to protect you, you will need to include your address and birth date. You may also need to sign a release stating you have granted permission for your new doctor to obtain your medical records. If a release is needed, your new doctor probably has the form that you will need to sign.

Settle up your account. Just because you are firing your doctor doesn't mean you are no longer accountable for your outstanding bills. Make sure you have an accurate accounting of what you owe, and pay up.

Don't burn bridges. Even though you have decided to no longer employ your doctor, you should always remain professional and cordial. You may need to call again on your former physician, so you will want the bridge to her care to remain open.

➤ *Even though you have decided to no longer employ your doctor, you should always remain professional and cordial.*





Prescription 5

Know Who to Hire

5

You've decided to break up with Dr. Wrong. That's a big step, but how do you go about finding Dr. Right? Choosing a doctor is one of the most critical decisions we make – in fact, our lives might depend on it. There is no fool-proof way to find the perfect doctor, but there are some excellent guidelines you can follow. Here are my suggestions:

Make a wish list. Create a list of the “must haves,” essential qualities that you want to see in the doctor of your dreams. Everybody's list will be a little different, but here are some ideas to get you started:

- *Background (strong academic history, board-certified)*
- *Specialty*
- *Experience level*
- *Insurance coverage*
- *Hospital affiliations*
- *Location*
- *Communication style*
- *Gender*
- *Days and hours of service*
- *Use of electronic records*
- *Availability for questions: communication by email a big plus*

Now that you have created a picture of your dream doctor, your next step is to actually find your perfect partner in health. I would suggest you employ a variety of methods in your search, such as:

Request personal recommendations. Even in the age of the Internet, it is still a good first step to ask a trusted friend or family member for a recommendation. However, make sure you know what specialty you want, and the specialty of the doctor being recommended to you.

Ask another doctor. If you are looking for a specialist, certainly your primary care physician is a good source for recommendations. But you can reach out to anyone in your medical care community. My very favorite primary care physician was brought to my attention by my allergist.

Search online. Online doctor locators have become a burgeoning business that helps people find physicians in their area. I think this service provides a useful tool, but one that should be used with caution. The Internet is full of good information. However, some of





Prescription 5

Know Who to Hire (continued)

5

the content is sponsored by special interest groups, industry associations and others – which could lead to biased information. There is a lot of information available online about doctors, both positive and negative. It is our personal responsibility to retrieve this information with our own well-being in mind.

Schedule an appointment. Once you have found a doctor you are interested in hiring, if at all possible, schedule an initial appointment to determine if you are comfortable with the doctor. (Not all doctors, especially those in high demand, will agree to this). It is a good idea to let your prospective new doctor know what you are looking for in a doctor-patient relationship, and also take some time to interact with the office staff.

Trust your gut. At this point, you have gathered a lot of information. You have determined the kind of doctor you are looking for, received some recommendations, done research online and interviewed your potential hire. The last step you need to take, and this is an important one, is to ask your gut: is this the one? If the answer is yes, then great! Give her the job. But if something is bothering you, or if the little voice in the back of your head is making you question your choice, then it is best to keep looking.

The right doctor is out there – and it is worth taking the time to find the right one for you.



Final Thoughts



At some point in life, we will all journey into the healthcare system. Whether it is to seek care for yourself or a loved one, it is a life passage that involves many people, many moving parts, moments of frustration, and hopefully great joy and success. Perhaps the old adage “knowledge is power” applies to your healthcare voyage more than any other situation in life. So be wise, be prepared and remember to pack *5 Prescriptions You Won't Find in Your Doctor's Bag: When and How to Fire Your Doctor.*

Dear Readers,

Thank you so much for reading *5 Prescriptions You Won't Find in Your Doctor's Bag: When and How to Fire Your Doctor.* I know firsthand the importance of a great patient-doctor relationship. I believe the action I took to fire my doctor and hire a new one at a critical time in my care saved my life. No matter what your situation, we all deserve the best possible care. I hope that sharing my experience and hard-earned knowledge will make your healthcare journey more manageable for you and your loved ones.

And that is why I have made this eBook so easy to share. Whether you are seeking care for yourself or a loved one, finding support is only a click away. Just go to my website www.MyrtlePotter.com and click on the eBook cover. It's that simple.

I also hope while at my website, you will find lots of other useful tools and information to help you successfully navigate the healthcare system. There are videos, podcasts, lots of useful articles and resources.

Best Wishes for the Best Health,

Myrtle Potter

Your Trusted Voice in Healthcare™

Please visit me at www.MyrtlePotter.com



About Myrtle

Myrrtle Potter is one of America's foremost and most accomplished healthcare leaders and innovators. She has dedicated three decades to serving the needs of millions of consumers through her leadership of some of America's most successful global healthcare companies. Myrtle is on the boards of Medco Health Solutions, Inc., and Everyday Health Inc. Myrtle's vast experience has earned her the reputation as *Your Trusted Voice in Healthcare™*.

The dynamic intersection of Myrtle's knowledge of the healthcare industry and her own near-death health scare culminated in the creation of Myrtle Potter Media, a company that provides guidance, tools and resources to millions of Americans to help them navigate the U.S. healthcare system.

Myrtle is seen on Accent Health Television, which is broadcast in over 30,000 physician offices nationwide and viewed by 153 million consumers each year. She is also a featured business commentator on CNBC and can be found on EverydayHealth.com and www.MyrtlePotter.com.

Myrtle previously held executive-level positions at Genentech, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Merck, and served on the board of Amazon.com for five years. She was three times named one of the "Top 50 Most Powerful Women in Business" by *Fortune* magazine. Myrtle is a graduate of the University of Chicago and the co-author of *Living Proof* (2011), which can be purchased on her website at www.MyrtlePotter.com.



5 Prescriptions You Won't Find in Your Doctor's Bag: When and How to Fire Your Doctor

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