

Message from the coordinator, 3/15/06

Did you know that less than half (42 percent) of people who visit their physician for complaints of pain believe that their physician understands how their pain makes them feel? This is according to a research by the University of Washington's Department of Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine.

Many factors contribute to the under-assessment and under-treatment of pain. But this statistic suggests that one of the main factors might be a lack of good old conversation. Clear communication between physician and patient is the key.

Since chronic pain cannot be determined or measured by lab tests, x-rays or stethoscopes, its assessment is primarily, if not solely, dependent on the patient's ability to clearly convey what he or she is experiencing. Most of us are able to tell the doctor that we have frequent headaches or our back hurts all the time. It seems simple enough. But when you consider the vast number of diagnoses, medications and treatments that a physician must consider when presented with a complaint of pain, an effective outcome may be in the details of your description.

"But the doctor's so busy. He doesn't have time to hear about my pain." Right? If you've ever thought that, think again. Don't let your perception of your physician's busy schedule stop you from communicating your condition and needs.

One helpful step you can take is to get organized. Keeping a journal of your pain is an effective tool. It doesn't have to be difficult or time-consuming and it's something you can actively do to improve that all-important communication with your physician.

A pain journal can also help you, not just your physician. You may be surprised to see the patterns that emerge when stepping back to look at pain level related to activity and treatment over a period of time. And the ability it can give you to convey the details of what you are experiencing and your perception of your pain, can give the physician what is needed to provide you with the most effective pain management program.

If you would like a free pain journal booklet to track your symptoms and treatment, call me at (503) 945-7009. I will be glad to provide them to those interested, while supply lasts.

-- Diana