



# “Give it to me straight, doc!”

*What you won't hear from Abby*

**1** I'm single and really like my doctor. I think my doctor likes me too. Can I ask my doctor out on a date?

No, absolutely not. Your doctor is morally and ethically bound to politely decline your request. One of the most powerful rules governing your doctor concerns intimate relations with patients. Doctors cannot date their patients. By so doing they could be found guilty of professional misconduct and risk losing their licences — especially if they are found to have taken advantage of this position. This may seem harsh but it is intended to protect you, the patient. Your

doctor has a very special relationship with you and it is necessary to have safeguards in place to ensure he or she does not abuse this position of influence and trust.

**2** Can I “friend” my doctor on Facebook?

Best not. Unless your doctor is already a personal friend, you may place him or her in the difficult position of being both your professional adviser on health matters and a part of your Facebook network. Also, do you really want your doctor to know all the intimate details of matters you may

discuss among your Facebook friends? From your doctor's perspective, it is likely to be an unsatisfying interaction because he or she is not going to share personal details with you unless you are friends outside of the office.

### **3** Should I complain if my doctor keeps me waiting for 30 minutes for my appointment?

You certainly can express your concern about being kept waiting, but complaining will probably not benefit anyone. Without making excuses for the medical profession, I should say that scheduling is very challenging, especially in a family practice where patients may raise a number of issues beyond the reason for their initial visit. In addition, most family doctors have to fit in urgent patients every day and also have to deal with very serious issues like depression, chest pain and other emergencies than can take a lot longer than a normal appointment. So as they get into the clinic's schedule, they get behind. Sorry about this, but some day the extra time taken could be for you, and they try and give the best care they can to all their patients.

### **4** I think my doctor made an error and was rude about it as well. To whom do I complain?

First and foremost, please express your concerns to your doctor. Often simple misunderstandings are easily cleared up by a direct conversation in which you both express your views and can clearly understand each other's viewpoints. Every province and territory in Canada has well-established means put in place for you to voice concerns about physicians and to have your concerns assessed objectively. These almost always involve a call or email to the licensing body for physicians, generally known as the College of Physicians and Surgeons. For mistakes or errors made in hospitals or other health-care institutions, there are also mechanisms for having these matters investigated. But these should be the last rather than the first step.

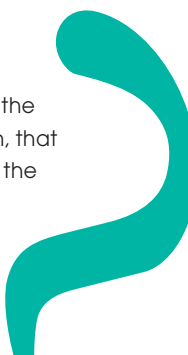
If you think your doctor is giving bad advice, you should certainly seek out a second opinion from another qualified physician. As for rudeness, as with anyone else, there is never a good reason for your doctor to be rude. Doctors do, however, work in very stressful environments and can sometimes seem abrupt or unfeeling when no discourtesy is intended. If you feel that your doctor has been rude, you should communicate this.

### **5** Can I email my doctor a picture of my rash and ask her to send me an email with her diagnosis?

Not a good idea for a couple of important reasons. Unless you have a prior arrangement with your doctor and have established a secure connection, you should never email personal details about your health to your physician.

Regular email channels are not secure. In addition, most doctors get lots of emails and will only read them when they have the opportunity. In a small but growing number of medical practices, doctors and patients can communicate by email. But even if you are a patient in one of these practices, you should not send an email looking for guidance on an urgent matter because there is no guarantee it will be read in a timely manner. Further, you will gain little by sending your doctor a picture of your worsening skin problem. In order to make a proper diagnosis, your doctor needs to view it directly as well as taking into account your medical history and any medications you are on, all of which may be missing from your email.

### **6** My doctor saved my son's life. Is it acceptable to give my doctor a special token of my appreciation?

Human beings like to have their work appreciated, and doctors are no different. A small token of appreciation for a job well done will be much appreciated by your doctor and the staff he or she works with. Remember, though, that your doctor is a professional and this is what the medical profession does for a living. An expensive gift may cause embarrassment and your physician may be placed in the difficult position of having to return it to you and risking offending you. Also, remember that your doctor works as part of a team and making your card/flowers/chocolates out to everybody in the office or surgical staff will be seen both as a more appropriate and an even nicer gesture. 

*Questions and answers compiled by Pat Rich with input from physicians on the Canadian Health Advisory Board.*

