

# The Smart Patient

When it comes to your health, knowledge is power.

**M**y husband and I just re-modeled our kitchen. Among other things, we had to select new kitchen appliances, and we wanted to make sure that we purchased the most energy-efficient appliances of the highest quality and best value for the money. We pored over information from *Consumer Reports*, manufacturers, and the Internet. It took a lot of time, but we got a great new kitchen—that came in under budget!

Think about the last time you made a major purchase: Did you talk to friends and experts? Did you do research to make sure that you got what you needed at the best price? In this issue of *Neurology Now*, we have several stories that highlight why you need to be an informed health care consumer.

It really begins with being as informed as possible about your health. If you have a neurological problem, reading *Neurology Now* is a good place to start. You need to know as much as you can about your health so that you can talk to your doctor about important new symptoms and know what questions to ask about diagnosis and treatment options. Credible, reliable sources of information are a must—and not that easy to find. We take great pride in bringing you stories, reports, and additional resources that are absolutely trustworthy.

Being an informed patient can impact just about every aspect of your life. For example, did you know that the Americans with Disabilities Act protects your rights in the workplace? Read “Know Your Rights” (page 34) to learn about accommodations that employers are required to provide for people—by law—with neurological and other disabilities. The purpose of this law is to allow all Americans to fully participate in society and contribute their skills and talents.

In Penny Wise (“Generic Vs. Brand-Name Drugs,” page 44), we’ll help you understand the pros and cons of generic versus prescription medications. According to DiMasi and colleagues in a 2003 paper in the *Journal of Health Economics*, when pharmaceutical companies discover a potential new drug, it takes an average of seven-and-a-half years and

\$802 million dollars in research and development costs to take it to market. Only then, with the approval of the Food and Drug Administration, can it be accessible to help patients.

Pharmaceutical companies protect their right to recoup these costs and make a profit by patenting potential new drugs. This means that for up to 20 years that a new drug is on the market, no other company can produce it. After that, other companies are free to produce a generic version of the drug.

Often these generic versions are every bit as good as the brand-name drug—and are usually much cheaper. Sometimes, though, there are enough small differences in effectiveness or how quickly a generic drug gets in to the bloodstream that problems can occur if a generic is switched for a brand-name or vice versa. Knowing about this and discussing it with your doctor can help insure that your symptoms are well controlled and prevent you from developing side effects or paying more than you need to for your medication.

We all want to be sure that we are getting the most up-to-date care possible, and this means staying on top of the latest medical research developments. But sometimes the research reported in newspapers and magazines seems too good to be true. How do you make sense of this

information and know whether the results really apply to you? In “Miracle Drug! Or Not” (page 40), we help you navigate through medical research findings. Armed with these skills, you will be able to make the most of what you read, understand your options, and feel comfortable discussing them with your doctor.

Knowledge about our health really is power! It informs our choices and leads to the best health possible.



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