



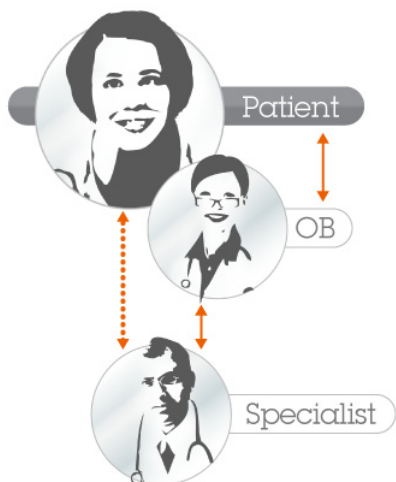
My Story: “You will always start with me .”



In my blog post, I set out my thesis that effective personal healthcare management is best done by a team led by an objective, patient-centric “strategist” who understands the totality of our complex healthcare system. Here I share the details of my recent personal experience that has contributed to the development of my POV.

At this writing I am pregnant with my first child. My husband and I are the first children in our respective families to have a child. We are definitely starting from the ground up as far as rules of the road go, particularly when it comes to managing a preexisting condition along side managing my pregnancy. Recently, my preexisting flared up. My first question was, “Who do I call to talk about this flare up? My GI specialist or my OB?”

Normal protocol would be to call the specialist, but given the added health consideration of my baby, I did not know if normal protocol still applied. Just to be on the safe side, I called the OB, expecting the answer to be, “Go to your GI.” Her answer was surprising both in its simplicity and in the larger strategy it set out.

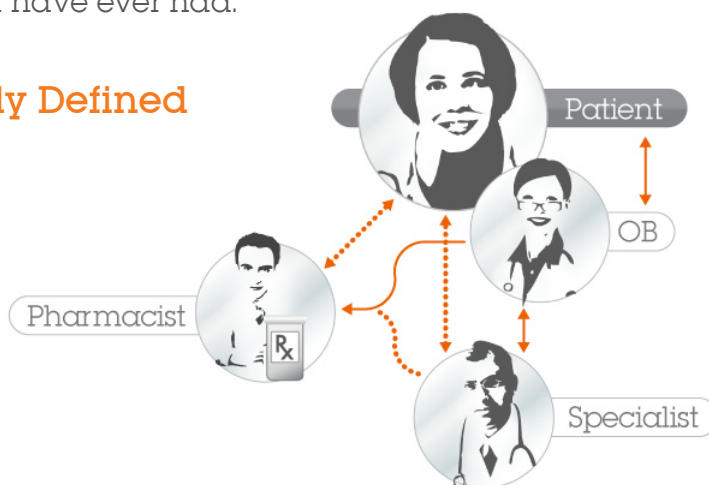


“Jerilyn, this is the one time in your medical health where you get to have a strategist. In the same way that I coordinate lab/ hospital visits and all of your insurance interactions related to your pregnancy, I also coordinate any specialist visits you may require. You will always start with me. You get pink eye, you come to me first. Stomach bug, call me and I will work with your PCP on the right course of action. Same goes in this situation.”

A few days later, feeling much better after visits to her, to my specialist, and to the pharmacy to get a prescription both doctor’s “signed off” on, I have some thoughts around what made this experience one of the most positive health management experiences I have ever had.

Role of the Pharmacist was Clearly Defined

Normally, when I go to the pharmacy, I expect some amount of frustration in dealing with the person behind the counter because of a poorly defined set of expectations as to what that person’s role is and how s/he should best execute that role.



In this instance, happily, my expectations were not met. The pharmacist immediately acknowledged not only the current reason for the visit (that my stomach was acting up again), but also the fact that I was pregnant. She did have an alternative suggestion for me around my medications, but understood that both scenarios needed to be taken into account and that clearly, my doctor(s) should be consulted before adjusting anything. She also made it clear that she would be filling the current prescription and simply writing down the suggestion for me to take back to my doctors for a follow-up discussion if I so chose.

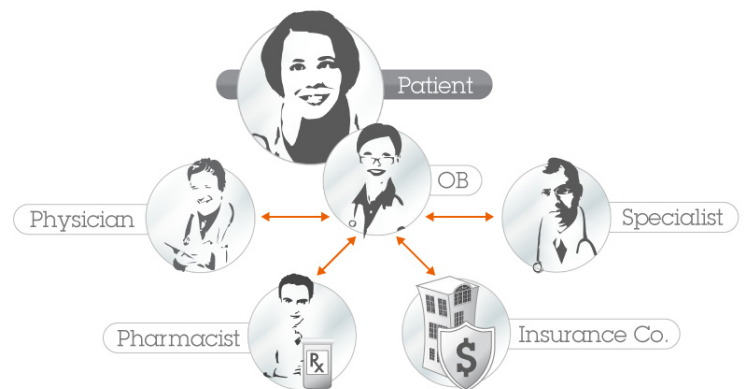
What impressed me about this interaction was that she treated my health (and her role in it) not as a one-sided argument, rather as a discussion that needed to involve multiple players. She found a way to balance my role as the patient with hers as a knowledgeable outside point of view as well as with the roles of my doctors as SME's and ultimately the ones accountable for the course of treatment. She also did not burden me with the administrative voice of the insurance company, which I am sure was an influencer in her decision to make a recommendation, but might not necessarily influence my decisions or my doctors'.

Complete Access to a Collaborating "Team" of Doctors

Because of my pre-existing condition, I am used to working with numerous doctors when it comes to managing my health. Unfortunately, none of my doctors typically talk to one another. Even my personal care physician doesn't seem to have a real picture of what is going on with me holistically beyond what I am able to catch her up on during my annual visit.

My pregnancy changed everything. My OB was not lying when she proclaimed herself my "strategist". For the first time ever, I believe there is one person who has a complete view of my health. More importantly, for the first time, I also believe that there is a team of doctors working to ensure my continued health.

What impressed me about this interaction was that during the resolution of my flare-up, both doctors worked together (without me playing go-between) to collaborate on a course of treatment that would help me get better and keep my baby's health needs in mind. They also managed the health insurance interactions, which can be very tricky with my particular pre-existing, and the pharmacy to ensure no last minute glitches would get in the way of my immediate medication needs.



Proactive Ownership of My Health

I believe I am on-top of my health. I do my best to follow healthy living habits and because I am lucky to have good health insurance, I don't need to wait until there is a problem to see a doctor. Preventative care is simply part of my wellness "adherence" program. That said, I have always been a bit disappointed in the lack of proactive ownership those parties involved in my health management have shown in helping me stay healthy.

Once again, pregnancy seems to have changed everything. In addition to the no brainers such as appointment/prescription reminders and other system generated check-ins, I have real live people reaching out and supporting me through this journey.

What is really impressing me is both my doctors are checking-in to see how things are going with the medications they collectively prescribed for me. Also, my pharmacy is making some good recommendations for additional steps I can take that support my doctor's treatment program. And most impressively, my insurance company is finding a way to remain behind the scenes on all of those annoying administrative tasks, yet finding a safe role for themselves in providing additional live resources for me to leverage as I go through my pregnancy, especially when my doctors are not available to me.

What It All Means

As I stated in my blog, I am sure there are a lot of stories like mine, and a lot in direct contradiction to it. But my goal here isn't to tell an Everyman story. My goal is to highlight what I believe is a recurring theme in healthcare: The need for better and more open collaboration and communication between all of the people involved in managing any patient's health.

A good patient experience isn't about a solitary owner; it is about a good point person who is knowledgeable in all touch points and objective enough about the emotional part of health management to take the lead and "own" the coordination, leading all players toward the same mutually agreed upon desired outcome. In other words, a personal "healthcare strategist."



Jerilyn MacLaren-Hall is an Account Director in the Experience Design (XD) group at MISI Company. The views expressed in this article are hers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the company or its employees.