

Taking Control of Your Health (for Young Adults)

Adrienne H. Kovacs, PhD, CPsych
Toronto Congenital Cardiac Centre for Adults
Peter Munk Cardiac Centre, University Health Network
University of Toronto

May 3, 2008
ACHA National Conference, Philadelphia, PA



What do (we think)
we know about this?



ACHD health professionals talk about “transition”

- Transition: A shift in the responsibility of health care management from the family to the patient



Transition* can be difficult for...

- Patients
- Parents
- Pediatric health care providers
- Adult health care providers

* Taking more control of health care, finishing school, getting a job, living away from family, pursuing romantic relationships



Specific Challenges

- Well-intentioned parents and family members
- First visits (and hospital stays) in adult hospitals
- Follow-up visits (and hospital stays) in pediatric hospitals (when you're an adult)
- Expectations from pediatric and adult health care providers



Suggestions for taking greater control of your health



Gradually assume greater control of your health care

- Make your medical appointments
- Keep your own medical records
- Discuss this process with your family ahead of time



Be Prepared for Appointments

- Write down questions ahead of time
- Keep an ongoing list of questions (eg, in your daytimer)
- Leave room to write down answers....and don't forget to take a pen
- Be prepared to discuss your symptoms



Questions to Consider

- Medications
- Symptoms
- Testing – what, if, when, and why
- Treatment – options, pros and cons
- Follow-up appointments – why and when
- Lifestyle concerns (e.g., exercise, diet, pregnancy, travel)



Be Honest

- The more information you give your medical team, even about sensitive issues and risky behaviours, the better that they can provide you with accurate guidance



Be Assertive



Assertive communication:

You clearly express your opinions, feelings, and concerns, but not at the expense of other people



Be An Active Listener

- Repeat a summary of your understanding of what was said in your own words
- This reduces the chance of misunderstandings (and avoids mind-reading)
- Communicate when you agree and disagree



Know that it's still okay to include family members and friends

- If you have a lot of difficulty asking questions and/or keeping track of the information, consider having someone come with you
- This person should have a designated role ahead of time – eg, note-taker



Finally, and most importantly, what are your questions or experiences?

