



MANITOBA INSTITUTE
FOR PATIENT SAFETY

Make It Personal: Interview Series

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An Interview with Connie Newman

Connie Newman is the Executive Director of the Manitoba Association of Senior Centers, who serves many non-profit organization committees, and is a sought after speaker for Senior's groups and organizations. She is best known for her radio column "Coffee and Conversation with Connie and Company" on CJNU 93.7 Nostalgia Radio. Connie's mission is to share information with older adults and seniors that will support their health and well-being.



Knowledge is Power

"Knowledge is power" is Connie's catch phrase. She says, "Just because we turn 65 doesn't mean our need for knowledge stops. The organizations I work with help communities help people age well. I talk to seniors about patient advocacy and patient safety as one piece of the package of taking care of yourself and aging well. We are all the keepers of our own body, so we need to know how to take care of it."

Connie loves talking to senior's groups because she can see an immediate impact. Connie shares the MIPS tools and resources like the medication card, and the patient advocate form. Connie explains, "I know that the work I am doing is helping, because the audience will tell me how they are going to immediately use the information. For example, at my last presentation, half of the audience asked for ERIK kits." (ERIK – Emergency Response Information Kit)

Know What Questions to Ask

Connie explains, "Part of my role is to ensure that patients/clients/senior centre members have the knowledge base that they need to ask questions. To me, patient safety is all about knowing what questions to ask and making sure I know what to encourage other people to ask."

Connie believes that in order to ask questions, people need a base level of knowledge, and they need to feel confident to say when they don't understand. "If I feel good about myself, it's ok to ask questions, but if I don't feel good about myself and I don't have a moral support person



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with me, it will be difficult for me to feel confident asking questions.” Connie believes, as a society, we need to help people feel good about themselves, and then step in to help those not well enough to ask questions themselves.

Connie says it is also important to know *how* to ask questions. “We are in a system where we only have 10 minutes in a physician’s appointment. This can be difficult for people who love to talk. They need to make sure their questions are on point. This is how the questions from MIPS are helpful in helping people know what to ask and how to ask it directly.”

Tips for Being a Patient Advocate

Connie is a patient advocate for three people in her life. I was struck by Connie’s thoughtfulness in this role, particularly how she adapts to people’s abilities to allow them to be as autonomous as possible. Connie has developed several strategies to be an effective patient advocate. One is to help the patient be prepared in advance so they will be confident asking questions during the visit. She also makes sure she has a good understanding of their current concerns and questions so she can make sure nothing is missed in the visit. During the visit, rather than asking questions directly to the health professional herself, she will prompt the patient to share their concerns. For example, she might say to the patient, “Was there something about your shoulder that you wanted to share?”

It is also important to take notes during the visit so that there is a written record of the visit. “I put the date and the person that we met with, along with point form notes to help remember what the conversation was about.” During the visit, she is also observing the patient which allows her to be responsive to their needs. Connie says, “One time, I noticed that the patient didn’t seem to be understanding something. I said to the patient, ‘did you understand what the doctor just said to you?’ Just by saying that, the doctor rephrased the information in a way that the patient was able to understand.

Through Connie’s good work, seniors are becoming empowered to make sure their own, and their neighbours, health needs are met. Consider becoming a patient advocate for someone in your life.

The Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation established in 2004 to promote and coordinate activities that improve patient safety and enhance quality healthcare in Manitoba.

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