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Partnering With Your Primary Care Provider

body health. A primary care provider will not just focus on a patient's specific symptoms and treatments during their care, but will also address the whole patient — talking to them about self-management, exercise, nutrition, sleep habits, goals, personal interests, and much more.

For many, this might sound like an unrealistic dream. However, the collaborative board of patients and providers of Life Laboratory envision this holistic model through selected family medical practices that are serving as "living laboratories." These primary care practices provide a proof-of-concept for the best ways to achieve quality, healthy outcomes, and lower-cost healthcare.

What patients need

As in all of areas of life, a successful partnership can't be a one-way street; both parties must take the initiative to make the partnership work.

In numerous studies that have been conducted over the

years, there are two common themes on the top of patient wish lists regarding their relationships with their doctors: communications and thoroughness, which tend to go hand-in-hand.

Patients are looking for a primary care provider to spend enough time to be

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thorough and not feel rushed. They want a provider who will listen and truly understand their symptoms, clearly communicate the diagnosis and treatment, and walk them through what will happen next.

But, partnerships are about two-way communications. Doctors need patients to communicate clearly as well. Patients need to articulate their symptoms and any other information that could be related to the issue at hand, and ask questions when they do not understand. Without open communication, there is little chance for a successful patient-provider partnership.

Beyond the symptoms

This holistic approach is not just about treating symptoms, but about preventing them and educating patients on total mind-body health issues.

By partnering with a



primary care provider for overall health, the provider will know important details, such as all of the medications (prescription and nonprescription) the patient is taking, the patient's complete medical history, and family history. The provider can also communicate with specialty care providers on the patient's behalf and participate in developing a health risk profile.

It is also valuable for the provider to know other non-health-related information such as the patient's occupation, spiritual beliefs, personal goals, family relationships, etc. Although a direct connection may not be obvious, this information can help a provider determine what may contribute to the patient's symptoms, as well as prevent future health issues and help address tough questions such as advance directives.

With a holistic approach to primary care medicine, there is a better chance for earlier detection, more accurate diagnoses, earlier treatment, fewer complications, faster recovery, healthier outcomes, and much more.

Life Laboratory believes that even in today's changing healthcare environment, preserving old-fashioned values where doctors and patients form bonds needs to be at the core of healthcare moving forward. The organization's proof-of-concept model is built

around spending appropriate time with the provider as one of the cornerstones of receiving optimal care. Add this to electronic medical records, where patient history is readily available and important data can be shared with authorized parties, and Life Laboratory believes the result will be healthy outcomes at lower costs for all stakeholders.

Can you imagine having a relationship with your primary care provider where you are partnering to ensure your total health?

That's what the patient board of Life Laboratory envisions. As a non-profit organization, Life Laboratory is focused on improving healthcare quality by advocating for a primary care model where a provider has the time to truly know the whole patient and his or her family.

In this holistic approach, there is more opportunity for the patient-provider partnership to focus on total mind-



S. Nicholas Lezzi is the chairman of the board of Life Laboratory, a non-profit organization that is affiliated with Family Practice of Upper Dublin.

Tips for a Successful Patient-Provider Partnership

- **OPEN COMMUNICATIONS:** Provide all information that might be relevant.
- **BE PREPARED:** Bring notes and a list of questions to be addressed.
- **BE COMPLIANT:** Take your medications as directed.
- **STAY ON TRACK:** Take notes during appointments and keep your own medical history.
- **BE UNDERSTANDING:** Make the most of the time allotted for your visit.

For more information or to become a friend of Life Laboratory, please visit LifeLaboratory.org or call 215-646-6504.