

Paperwork, protocols part of treatment

by Mark Pavilons

It's funny how human beings have the ability to cut to the chase, and look at the very nuts and bolts of things.

We are emotional, spontaneous, spiritual creatures, and yet so much in our lives is cut and dried, and revolves around straightforward forms, documents, calls and emails.

In our world of connectivity, I've also become accustomed to many online forms, Docusign, PDF fillable pages, consent forms, the list goes on.

Yes, it's all very convenient and time-saving, but all so cold.

I'm half-way through my chemo treatment at Southlake and between referrals, appointments and drug authorizations, I've been inundated with pages and pages of forms to fill. Yes, it's all necessary and I suppose it makes things much easier than in-person visits and driving all over southern Ontario.

That's the gift technology has given us.

I'm astonished that forms actually exist for unique and individual applications. I suppose I'm by no means alone in all of this, and there are countless souls going through the same.

And dealing with insurance companies, patient support agencies, and pharmacies is all part of the process.

And yet, I don't think all of the burden should be placed on the patient, who's often not at their best, and can't really handle such added stress.

Being on hold, especially when the call is regarding important medication, is also frustrating.

?Your call is important to us ...? Or maybe it isn't, judging by the run-around and choice of muzak.

Going for treatment, especially cancer treatment, should be fairly simple, orderly, efficient.

Sure, today's technology affords us ?patient portals??that contain all of our records, appointments and reminders. Great if you are tech savvy, but I can't help but think of the seniors (who make up a large portion of cancer patients) who may not be able to access and understand the information.

Also, getting test and bloodwork results are also great, if you're versed in bio-chemistry and understand what the numbers mean.

Once, when I received some test results, I went on Google to decipher what they meant, and I went down a very depressing and misleading rabbit hole. Not useful at all ?the opposite, in fact.

That's why I always left such things to my physicians, and in-person consultations.

I had a bit of a not-so-merry-go-round with one of my medications. It seems the cancer centre's protocol is to issue a prescription the day I see the physician, often two days prior to my chemo treatment. Alas, that turned out to be too short notice for Shoppers Specialty Pharmacy to process it, get it to a courier and shipped to my house. Once it was two days' late. In my case, this wasn't life-saving medication, but it was part of my treatment routine. I can't see why, after all the mounds of paperwork and approvals,

this can't be done more efficiently.

Then it dawned on me. The pharmacy wants the prescription so it can get paid (even though the insurance company said it was covered for an extended period). And the courier wants payment, too. Why no one trusts one another, or can't do a regular run on good faith, is beyond me. In the "good, old days," pharmacists would front you the pills and go out of their way to help.

Again, what if you're a senior who can't wait for important meds, and don't know who to call or email when the chips are down? I harassed everyone on my list of contacts for two days, and while they all received my pointed messages, the end result was the same.

Just when my faith in the medical and pharmaceutical systems rose, it fell again.

From physicians, cancer centres, hospital administrators, patient support services and drug suppliers, the system is multi-pronged. It's great when all these moving parts come together and work in harmony. It's disappointing (to say the least) when something, somewhere breaks down.

And there are few apologies, only the standard "we'll look into it" response. If you're at the top of the managerial food chain, shouldn't you know the reason?

I'm just a lowly journalist and newspaper editor and when someone calls me with a question that I don't know the answer to, I get it, often within the hour.

And I'm not in the business of saving lives.

There are, of course, upsides to the modern medical network.

I am still being monitored by physicians at Princess Margaret, who share info with staff at Southlake. How cool is that?

While there have been glitches and calls and emails, this networking, boosted by technology is just amazing. There are times when I feel a "village" is actually taking interest in little old me.

Staff at Southlake always respond to my concerns and work hard to solve my issues. I am impressed with their dedication.

The care at the Cancer Centre is also top-notch, and runs like a Swiss watch.

The nurses, nurse practitioners and doctors are well versed and up to speed on the latest developments in care.

You really can't ask for more.

I can't remember just how many times I repeated my name and date of birth in the past year or so.

I'm confident new systems and technology will make everything from treatment, scheduling and securing medications run perfectly.

And if that ends up saving lives, all the better.