

DOCTORS & HOME INSPECTORS

By

Bob Mulloy

Doctor-doctor, can you tell me what's ailing me Mr. MD? You may be wondering what this story has to do with home inspections, so let me continue and I think you will notice some interesting similarities between the two professions. This story relates what my doctor did for me and what we did together for the good of the public.

Lucky me, I had my annual physical examination the other day. I have had the same doctor for a number of years and we are able to talk both on a professional and friendly basis. I guess you could say, "he has a good bedside manner." Does this sound familiar?

My appointment was set at a scheduled time and I was ushered into the exam room where the nurse asked a few history questions about my general health. You know what I mean: "How have I been? Am I taking any medications? Let's take your blood pressure. I need a sample of your.... Etc. The doctor will be in soon she said, as she placed my chart in the bin on the door and left."

After a brief wait (lucky for me), I heard a rattle outside the door as my chart was pulled from the bin, papers were rustled and the doctor entered with a smile and friendly greeting. At this point, one of his objectives seemed to be the gathering of data similar to a seller disclosure of conditions. We discussed the age of the dwelling (me) and my health during the past year. His routine of fact gathering and judgment plus evidence approach to my physical condition seemed familiar. He was working with his senses, performing a visual examination, making observations, forming opinions and making recommendations. Now where have I seen this process done before I thought?

After fact gathering, the doctor next examined the exterior of the dwelling. He walked all the way around me and used the technique of probing & sounding to determine conditions (ouch). Notes were taken and he provided a guided professional discussion regarding each inspection procedure and his findings. The doctor was one up on me as he had the opportunity to view the patient without wall cladding; the sheathing had goose bumps! At least he did not climb on the roof! (But he did enter the crawl space!)

To continue, the doctor completed his exterior inspection and proceeded to the mechanical systems. He gave careful scrutiny to the plumbing system and HVAC. Each orifice was examined for defects (what a revolting development). Once again, he took control of the inspection by performing practiced observations and explanation in layman's terms. Notes were taken and in his verbal and written report, he made a referral to other experts for reappraisal of components or systems thought to be defective. Don't get nervous, I'm going to live but the specialist will really take "an end run" to perform his inspection of the on-site waste disposal system.

In reflection, while we home inspectors are certainly not doctors, we still share similar roles of protecting the health and welfare of our patient or client, which ever the case may be. As professionals, both doctors and home inspectors follow standards of practice to insure a practiced policy of due care in the field and in documenting our observations.

The similarities between the two professions are no great revelation, but what transpired at the end of my physical may be of interest to you. Upon completion of the exam, the doctor said: **"See you next year, and don't forget to change the batteries in your smoke detectors!"** The remarks really hit me as I was already mentally comparing our roles. I asked the doctor to explain the purpose for his remarks and he said: **"Well, we doctors examine the patient annually, but often forget about their health & safety the rest of the year. I feel sad when I meet a patient in the emergency room because of an accident in the home or automobile. So, by reminding each patient to change the batteries in their smoke detectors, perhaps I can save a life."**

As we are also friends and time was available, I thought about the doctor's comments and said, "I would like to suggest several additions to your parting advice to patients". We discussed my profession and I proposed that he also advise clients to install GFCI devices at all damp areas. After explaining what a GFCI is and its purpose, the doctor was very receptive and requested additional tips. We put our heads together, did a little brainstorming and developed a list of items that a doctor could pass along to clients. Furthermore, we decided to prepare a card titled **"HEALTH, HOME AND AUTOMOBILE ADVICE FROM YOUR DOCTOR."** On the card were printed short pieces of advice (see sample below) in each topical area along with a blank line for the doctor to write the date of the patient's next annual physical exam. The theory was that a patient would be more apt to read and save the card full of health & safety tips if it were also a notice of a future appointment, plus the recommendation for a next appointment would provide a measure of defense for the doctor.

In closing, the following is the card that my doctor & I developed. He plans to give a copy to each patient and hopes that the simple gesture will prevent an accident or illness, plus document a professional standard of care. Anyway, it was my pleasure to assist him and we both hope that our little card will be reprinted with permission and passed along to other doctors, patients and clients. To us, the remarks on the list are just common sense, but our clients need a kind reminder.

HEALTH - HOME - & VEHICLE ADVICE FROM YOUR DOCTOR:

HEALTH:

1. Don't smoke.
2. Drink only in moderation.
3. Exercise your body & follow a responsible diet.
4. Don't forget to schedule your next annual physical exam.
5. Provide sufficient sleep periods and plan a vacation.

HOME:

1. Change the batteries in your smoke detectors & practice a fire escape plan.
2. Teach children how to dial 911.
3. Install ground-fault-circuit-interrupters (GFCI) devices in your bathrooms, kitchen and all damp areas to prevent electrical shock. Check their function monthly.
4. Check each exit for safe handrails and steps. Be alert for any hazard in the home that can cause an accidental slip, trip or fall.
5. Place 4-inch street numbers above your front door for emergency vehicles.
6. Have your furnace serviced annually and all venting systems checked.
7. Have your chimney cleaned and inspected annually.
8. Install a carbon monoxide detector.
9. Make sure that your hot water temperature does not exceed 130 degrees F.
10. Have older homes tested for lead paint.

VEHICLE:

1. Use your seat belt.
2. Use appropriate child seats and learn how to install them properly.
3. Never leave children unattended in a car.

YOUR NEXT PHYSICAL DATE IS: _____

[Back HOME](#)