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John Tracy:

Welcome to this edition of Patient Listening a Podcast service from Marshfield Clinic where we present health topics to you without all the technical jargon so you can get information that is easy to understand and useful to you in your everyday life. I'm your host John Tracy.

The economic crisis facing American's is well reflected in a recent analysis of internet search behavior by digital marketers "comScore" <http://www.comscore.com/>.

Over the past year comScore has seen large increases in keyword searches that relate to the economy. Words and phrases like "unemployment, unemployment benefits, and mortgage" have appeared in searches on average 133% more often than they did one year ago.

Marshfield Clinic recognized that as the economy softened so would the usage of medical services. But at what costs? Short term gains by cutting visits to the doctor by health consumers can adversely affect their long term health goals. This was the reason that a group of physicians, dieticians and staff of business counselors put together a presentation called "Staying Healthy in tough economic times."

During the next several weeks I will be posting audio clips from the presentation that cover the main themes.

The first presenter, Dr. Tom Gabert is an internal medicine physician at the Marshfield Clinic Minocqua center.

His talk dealt directly with how to become a better health care consumer while visiting with your physician, when taking prescription medications, over the counter drugs, and supplements, how to design a physical activity plan on the cheap and some general lifestyle changes or modifications that can benefit you in the long run.

Here's Dr Gabert's presentation

Tom Gabert:

The first thing we want to talk about is that these tips apply all the time. It's not just during tough economic times; you can always be a smart consumer of health care going forward. If you are here at the clinic or at the hospital or any other health care provider, one of the things you want to ask to make sure to ask of your health care provider is what they think you should be doing. What you should be doing for your health. Make sure you understand the instructions about the medications, the exercise program, or the testing. Also make sure you come in and tell your provider what your interests and concerns are. I like it when patients bring in a list. It helps us focus on the issues you are concerned about. You're purchasing the health care, you're coming in to get help and you

should be the people who define what we are focused on. It's a mutual relationship between you and your provider, so feel free to bring that list in.

Many times patients come in with complaints or concerns that are not easily answered right away. And the third point I was making was that ask if after you are reassured that it is not an acute, life threatening problem that a trial of watchful waiting isn't appropriate. If you twisted your ankle, have a bit of a headache, have a bit of a sore throat or cough, something that doesn't need emergency surgery or immediate antibiotics: rather than do more x-rays, more tests, more blood work, is it more appropriate to wait a while and see if it gets better on its own or is there a conservative management where a little bit of exercise, heat, ice, a little bit of pain medication should get you through and get you better again. And the last thing is to know your insurance and your deductible on your policy. It's always very helpful to know going forward what is going to be covered, what isn't, what percentage is going to be covered, and what your costs are. Here at the clinic we have a business staff that is available to help with some of those questions. But I can assure you that the insurance plans and the deductibles change so quickly that we're always dependent of patients to keep well informed about those issues.

The second thing I wanted to talk about was prescription medications. We do a lot of that here. A lot of people walk out the door with prescriptions we have recently instituted electronic prescribing were for the majority of our patients, we simply scribe our name on the computer and the prescriptions are electronically transferred to our pharmacy or the pharmacy of your choice. It makes it more convenient for you. Make sure that we don't have errors but it's another example of how many prescriptions we write during the day. If something is prescribed, make sure you get copies of what you are to be taking and if they are brief treatments, take them as directed for the duration that they are requesting you to take it. Antibiotics are a great example of where people start to feel better and stop too soon. So if it is a ten day course of pills, take it for the full ten days. If you have side effects, call your provider or the pharmacist about the side effects. Don't just stop the medication. Many times when we start medications we want to see how you are doing if we want to modify the treatment. And if you are in that process and you stop early, you lose the chance to change to a different drug more fast or more quickly and get better more quickly. So don't be afraid to call. Don't worry about it, we want that feedback. Either tell us or the pharmacist about what side effects you might be having. As I said before, knowing your insurance product is very important. Knowing what your drug plan has for preferred medications. Every night I clean out my desk by finishing off five or six requests from insurance companies to change patients to different drugs that they would rather cover. Many times we can take care of that in the office and if your drug plan sends you a booklet that says preferred drugs or if you are with a state program that helps you with your medications, having that list is very helpful to us. And finally, be suspicious if someone offers you samples. Drug companies make money buy selling new and expensive drugs. They don't give us generics; they only give us the new expensive ones. They often work well and they are often appropriate, but you're only going to get a month or two and then you will end up paying for the next year or two of the medication. Feel free to ask if there is a less expensive but equally effective generic that would work for your condition.

The next little blinds talks about over the counter, or what we abbreviate as OTC treatments. Aspirin, Tylenol, Motrin, Aleve, all of those medications. They're always ok

to use in moderation, but if you take prescription medications, make sure you ask the pharmacist at the store or your provider whether you can use them long term. Many of those drugs interact with the medications that we prescribe and you want to have that discussion to make sure you're not running the risk of side effects. If I could take a moment about supplements; supplements are a multi-billion dollar a year business in this country. People spend more money on supplements than they do on doctor visits nationwide. Sometimes they are helpful. Many times people are pleased by how they are feeling, thinks it's due to the new medication or new supplement they're taking, and in fact they are not related at all. So what I would encourage you to do is start a journal of your symptoms. If your knee is giving you trouble or if you have back pain or you have ringing in the ears or you feel tired or fatigued; keep a journal every day. Maybe on a calendar and just right down the symptoms you're having before you start the new supplement you've picked up at the store. Once you start it, again, continue to write down how you are doing for a few weeks. And after a three or four week trial you are noticing improvement perhaps you want to stay with it. But frequently you will discover that over the span of three or four weeks, you're not doing any better than you were before and you can save yourself the thirty to forty dollars a month on a supplement that really isn't improving how you are feeling. Its important to realize that those often are very beneficial but many have been shown over the years to be unhealthy is the doses that were initially recommended. And so long term safety for those is not expected. There's no oversight or review in the country concerning supplements that you can pick up. And it is important to be cautious certainly with your money but especially your health. And just the last few points I wanted to make to stay healthy is to don't smoke, far and away the most important thing someone can do to live longer is to not smoke. With the cost of cigarette cartons going up the way they are it saves you money every day but it will definitely save you long term. Limit your alcohol use. We normally tell people no more than two in a day. If you are over 65 it's no more than one in a day. On average that will help your liver, help you feel better, take out some calories you don't need. Clearly something everyone can benefit from. And finally, stretch and walk everyday. Many patients buy exercise equipment that builds muscle strength. But as we get older, we need flexibility and regular exercise more than we need strength. And if you are designing an exercise program for yourself, stretching exercises to maintain flexibility to prevent falls and 30 to 60 minutes of brisk walking are as good an exercise as any expensive piece of equipment you can purchase.

John Tracy:

That's all the time we have for this edition of Patient Listening. Thanks for tuning in. Don't forget that this was part one of a podcast series designed to help you stay healthy in tough economic times. You can hear the latest edition of Patient Listening by subscribing to our RSS feed on our website at www.marshfieldclinic.org/podcasts or you can subscribe to the podcast series on I-tunes by going to your I Tunes account and searching for Marshfield Clinic.

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