

Knowledgeable amateurs

Knowledgeable friends or family members

A friend or relative who has fought through one or two tough encounters with the healthcare system can become quite adept at figuring out how things work, and helping to shepherd you through your own tough encounters.

You know the kind of person I'm talking about - the astute, tough, smart, assertive, persistent type who has been around the block a few times and is not intimidated by authority figures. Best case, this person is not nasty, arrogant, unpleasant or unnecessarily challenging, but instead is polite and reasonable. At the same time she will not be put off by half explanations or obfuscation.

Often, simply being accompanied by a person like this during your healthcare encounters will immediately change everybody's attitude. If you're lucky, it will change their attitude in a positive way, and make them a bit more forthcoming and direct, less likely to use euphemisms or to oversimplify important information.

Someone who's dealt successfully with the healthcare bureaucracy can be of immense help in offering suggestions and encouragement as you fight your own way through the red tape to get what you need.

Then, once you get the feel for it, you can become an advocate for someone else.

Next: Retainer (conciierge) physicians