Healthcare and the practice of medicine have changed dramatically since I was trained and started practice in the 1980’s! As a matter of fact, the pace of change we are experiencing is unmatched in history. In this article, I want to focus on one area of great importance: checkups and physicals and how and why they are so important.

Modern healthcare provides the opportunity and encouragement to see your Primary Care Provider (PCP) regularly. This is a concept that only ten years ago was not very commonly supported by the people who paid for health services, especially Medicare. When I began practice and until recently, patients most of the time had to pay for a “physical” out of their pocket. That physical emphasized the patient being interviewed and completely examined, plus multiple vials of blood drawn, procedures like a chest x-ray, EKG, or stress test performed, and possibly many other tests performed as a result of wanting to appear “complete.” Labs, procedures, and the like are not all benign. They can have safety implications, so only the right ones for the right patient should be performed. My first goal with a patient is DO NO HARM, but in the effort to appear like a good doctor, I wanted to do everything for my patients in order to not overlook ANYTHING.

When I learned to practice medicine, the computer was in the embryonic stages, especially in healthcare. Data and its value in helping us optimize the health of our patients in the “real world” were non-existent. As a result, I learned that doing it all was the best and highest quality care. With the expansion of technology, that premise is now absolutely WRONG! Old concepts die hard, so the realization that sinus infections get well without antibiotics over 90% of the time is hard for all providers to practice and for patients to accept. It is proven through rigorous study. I would commend the Choosing Wisely campaign as evidence of doctors deciding to inform the population of those things to avoid as possibly harmful and not helpful. It can be found online at http://www.choosingwisely.org.

Working in an accountable care organization with its physicians, other clinicians, and hospitals, we all strive to do what is RIGHT for our patients. Through data gathered with computerized health records and analytics, we are able to more accurately identify what groups of patients need testing and evaluations based on their age, gender, ethnicity, acute and chronic diseases, geography, and many other factors.

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In today’s healthcare, we are developing creative ways to prevent and treat diseases. We have virtual visits through secure email and video visits through secure face time including visits on mobile devices. But the most fundamental and basic element that powers all of this is the trusting relationship with your PCP. Your PCP should be your most trusted source for all of your healthcare questions.

The PCP can help guide patients to the proper behaviors for the best health with focused, evidence based, best recommended care. As a doctor, my responsibility is to keep up with and know the right things to do for my patients and to collaborate with them to help accomplish it, not do everything with the hope of finding something to treat at the risk of harming them.

Remember that contrary to what I was trained to believe, studies show that more than 60% of what contributes to optimizing your health comes from your lifestyle behavior decisions, not what I can do as a physician. Seeing your PCP regularly for checkups as recommended by evidence based guidelines and yearly wellness visits allows for the tests and evaluations right for you to be performed. Doctors have studied and recommended this approach. Now insurance companies and Medicare are in agreement and pay for it if backed by clinical evidence, usually with no out of pocket expense.

In my practice, I had many patients that did not want to “bother” me when they felt good, and they were reluctant to come in yearly. I was raised in that generation and respect that. The new reality is that doctors can do more to guide our patients the more we know about their risk factors and history. So today, periodic exams are widely supported and encouraged so that doctors can help patients stay up to date with what is indicated in this rapidly changing world of healthcare.

See your PCP as recommended, even if you are healthy. It is in the best interest of your health and the desire of all who really care for you. Our job is much more broad than just sick care. We want to be your partners in HEALTH care!

Roger Fowler, MD is Chief Medical Officer, Population Health and Health Plans for CHRISTUS Health.
Stand Up to Falls
Home is the place where we feel most safe, so it may come as a surprise to hear that falls in the home are one of the leading causes of injury-related death in the U.S., second only to poisoning.

Your bathroom is one of the most dangerous places in your home. Follow the suggestions on the right to reduce your risk of falling.

FAST STAT
Falls are the most common cause of traumatic brain injuries, including concussions.

June is National Safety Month

Preventing Falls in Your Bathroom
Falls can happen anywhere, but in your home, the bathroom is one of the most dangerous places. According to the CDC, about 235,000 people over age 15 visit the emergency room each year due to a bathroom related-injury. Older adults are especially susceptible. According to the National Institute on Aging, 80% of senior falls happen in the bathroom due to slippery floors and surfaces.

Keep loved ones of every age safe:
- Place a non-slip mat both inside and outside of the tub
- Use nightlights in and around the bathroom for increased visibility
- Clean up any condensation or puddles on the floor
- Place nonslip decals on the bottom of your shower or tub
- Keep shampoo, soap, and other bath products higher up to avoid bending
- Install grab bars by the toilet and in or near the shower and tub to assist older adults
- Make sure the bathroom door swings outward in case of a fall

Make your home safer by starting at the source. Remove tripping hazards around your home and ensure your bathroom is slip-free to eliminate the risk of falling.

Eliminate Tripping Hazards
Prevent falls at home – and at work- by removing sources of tripping:
- Secure electrical and phone cords away from walking areas, such as hallways or in front of your desk
- Use non-skid rugs and be sure to tape them down to prevent rolling
- Keep drawers and cabinets closed when you’re not using them
- Wear proper footwear, paying special attention to outdoor conditions
- Clean up any spills immediately and include warning signage if necessary
- Refrain from walking while distracted – stay focused on your surroundings
- Ensure there is adequate lighting in your workspace
- Don’t carry more than you can handle – large loads can obstruct your vision and affect your balance

Reduce your chances of falling by getting your vision checked regularly. If you take any medication, discuss common side effects such as dizziness and drowsiness with your doctor.
Memory loss that disrupts daily life may be a symptom of Alzheimer's or another dementia. Alzheimer's is a brain disease that causes a slow decline in memory, thinking, and reasoning skills. Below are ten warning signs and symptoms. Every individual may experience one or more of these signs in different degrees.

If you notice any of them, please see a doctor.

With early detection you can get the maximum benefit from available treatments; have more time to plan for the future; and get help for you and your loved ones.

Ten Early Signs of Alzheimer's

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life. Especially forgetting recently learned information; forgetting important dates and events; asking for the same information over and over; increasingly needing to rely on memory aids or family members.

2. Challenges in planning or solving problems. A change in the ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers; trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills; it may take much longer to do things than before.

3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work, or at leisure. Finding it hard to complete daily tasks; having trouble driving to a familiar location, remembering the rules of a favorite game.

4. Confusion with time or place. Losing track of dates, seasons, and the passage of time. May forget where they are or how they got there.

5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships. Difficulty reading, judging distance, and determining color or contrast which may cause problems with driving.

6. New Problems with words in speaking or writing. Trouble following or joining a conversation; struggling with vocabulary; calling things by the wrong name (e.g., calling a "watch" a "hand-clock.”

7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps. Putting things in unusual places and being unable to go back over their steps to find them; may accuse others of stealing.

8. Decreased or poor judgment. May make poor money decisions or give large amounts to telemarketers. May pay less attention to grooming and keeping themselves clean.

9. Withdrawal from work or social activities. May start to remove self from hobbies, social activities, work projects, or sports. May have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or remembering how to do a favorite hobby; may avoid being social because of changes they have experienced.

10. Changes in mood and personality. May become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful, or anxious. May become easily upset at home, at work, with friends, or in places outside their comfort zone.

If you notice any of these signs in yourself or someone you know, don’t ignore them! Schedule an appointment with your doctor.

For more information, visit: Alzheimer’s Association at alz.org®
2017 ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE FACTS AND FIGURES

MORE THAN 15 MILLION AMERICANS provide unpaid care for people with Alzheimer’s or other dementias in 2016. These caregivers provided an estimated 18.2 BILLION HOURS of care valued at over $230 BILLION.

In 2017, Alzheimer’s and other dementias will cost the nation $259 billion. By 2050, these costs could rise as high as $1.1 TRILLION.

35% of caregivers for people with Alzheimer’s or another dementia report that their health has gotten worse due to care responsibilities, compared to 19% of caregivers for older people without dementia.

ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE IS THE 6TH LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN THE UNITED STATES.

MORE THAN 5 MILLION AMERICANS are living with Alzheimer’s. By 2050, this number could rise as high as 16 MILLION.

EVERY 66 SECONDS, someone in the United States develops the disease.

IT KILLS MORE THAN breast cancer and prostate cancer COMBINED.

Since 2000, deaths from heart disease have decreased by 14% while deaths from Alzheimer’s disease have increased by 89%.

ALZHEIMER’S ASSOCIATION

THE BRAINS BEHIND SAVING YOURS’