Why Won’t Doctors Accept Each Other’s X-rays?

I had a lot of knee pain, and even with taking continual Advil, it just wasn't getting any better. In fact, it was getting worse. I went to see my primary care provider (PCP), and she thought it could be arthritis. She suggested continuing with the Advil and putting a cold compress onto my knee.

After a couple of months, I still wasn't getting better. I was having trouble walking, so I went back in and got a cortisone shot. Unfortunately, that only helped for a few days, leading my PCP to suggest an X-ray to confirm her suspicion of arthritis. I went to my local hospital and had the X-ray done, which showed fairly advanced arthritis. At that point, my PCP suggested that I make an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon.

I waited about a month for my appointment. When I got there, the orthopedic surgeon said, “Let’s go ahead and do an X-ray.” I told him that I'd already had one done at the hospital, just a month earlier. He told me that they didn't know how to do them correctly there and that we needed to do another X-ray, right there in his office. What was I going to say? I didn't think I needed a second X-ray, but I was in pain and wanted to get treated.

Subjecting me to a duplicative X-ray exposed me to unneeded radiation. It also cost my insurance company likely double, or more than that, of the amount that just the single X-ray would have cost.

If I were in this situation again, or if anyone asked me for advice on this, I'd suggest the following: Before you get an X-ray, ask your PCP to confirm with your specialist that they'll accept an X-ray from another hospital or care setting. The PCP's office and the specialist's office should talk to each other. They should agree on who does the X-ray and how it's done. This lack of communication is a deep problem in our healthcare system, and it exposed me to harm and wasted my insurance company's money. This is the kind of duplication and overuse that is adding to our health care costs.

Renate P., West Virginia

Here are five questions to ask about medical tests before surgery.

Have you talked with your health care provider about which tests and treatments you really needed -- and which you didn’t? Share your own story with us, and we'll consider it for inclusion. Contact us

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