

June 1, 2001

PATIENT POWERline from the desk of Marie Savard, M.D.

RE: Medical Records

Dear Friends,

Have you ever asked to see your medical file or the file of someone close to you? Let me tell you the story that began my crusade to teach people the importance of taking charge of their health and getting copies of their medical records.

Five years ago my father was rushed to a hospital in York, Pennsylvania where I grew up because of the sudden onset of severe dizziness and some slurring of his speech. His doctor suspected a small stroke and ordered an ultrasound of his carotid arteries to check for a possible blockage. This simple test uses sound waves to form a picture (many women have ultrasounds to check their baby while pregnant). By the time I arrived at the hospital the test was completed and my dad was anxiously waiting for the results. I knew that a preliminary report of the findings would be recorded on his medical chart, which was locked in the nursing station. My dad asked the nurse if I could see his medical file to learn more about what was going on (I wanted to know his blood pressure and blood test and EKG results). The nurse refused to show us the chart, telling us that we had to wait for the doctor. I could understand her concern, she didn't know about my training and experience as a general internist and thought perhaps I wouldn't understand.

But the truth is this: We are all entitled to copies of the information in our medical file -and having a copy of this vital information could be life-saving (and if we don't understand the information, we can ask questions). Recently Mary Shomon, the author of *Living Well With Hypothyroidism: What Your Doctor Doesn't Tell You....That You Need to Know*, interviewed me about the importance of medical records and how you can ask for them without offending your doctor. This and other interviews can be viewed at, <http://www.drsavard.com/printmedia.htm>.

Please feel free to pass this newsletter along to a friend or family member who may benefit from the information.

Here's to taking charge of your health!

Marie Savard, MD

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