

# Doctor, don't interrupt me

Imagine you're sitting in the exam room, the doctor comes in, says hello, and asks how to help. Imagine you begin speaking and talk until you are finished. The doctor doesn't interrupt. How long do you think most patients will talk if they are not interrupted?

Researchers reporting on a study in the British Medical Journal tried just that. Doctors were asked to time their patients, using a hidden stopwatch, and not interrupt until the patient said something like, "What do you think, doctor?"

The average talk time was just 92 seconds, and most patients (78%) finished within 2 minutes. Older patients tended to talk longer. The doctors felt that their patients were providing important information and did not feel the need to interrupt. But that was a forced study.

In actual practice, doctors interrupt in about 12 to 18 seconds.

Dr. Edward Creagan of Mayo Clinic offers this solution in his book, *How Not to Be My Patient*: "Unless you talk fast, it is absolutely crucial that you have the opportunity to voice your concerns without being shortchanged by the doctor jumping in. If the doctor interrupts you, it is appropriate to say, 'Doctor, I appreciate your jumping in, but please let me finish this thought.' This is a reasonable gesture to clearly get your points out."

