Editor's Letter

Who's Responsible for Your Health?

December 10, 2010 By Kate Ferguson

When I read about "Take Your Man to the Doctor," it really spiked my blood pressure. This is the recent campaign launched by Brooklyn's borough president, Marty Markowitz, calling on New Yorkers to get the men in their lives to visit the doctor for an annual checkup and to cultivate a relationship with a health care giver.

My initial reaction was, Uh-oh, here we go again: another biological mandate for the ladies. Yes, I know. Women are supposed to be born "nurturers." But why can't men be held accountable for nurturing themselves?

What's more, don't psychologists warn women to avoid "mothering" men, which confers the kiss of death on their relationships? Now I was really annoyed. Can't folks make up their minds what role they'd like women to play? And isn't it difficult enough for women to stay on top of their own health? Now they're being asked to assume responsibility for another adult's health too?

The impetus for the annual program is this: According to a 2009 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), men ages 18 to 44 were 70 percent less likely than women to visit a physician. The report also indicated that men were 80 percent less likely than women to have a regular source of health care.

In 2006, Markowitz became one of these statistics. He experienced chest pains but initially refused to go to the doctor, thinking it was just something he ate. Later, when the pain returned, Markowitz's wife insisted he go to the hospital. That visit landed him on the operating table where doctors placed two stents in his coronary artery to unblock the blood vessel and restore normal blood flow.

Although I sympathize with Markowitz, if an adult refuses to take control of his or her health and suffers because of it that's called consequences. I know this may sound harsh to some, but it's what happens when people make poor choices.

But Markowitz suggests nagging, dragging, cajoling or enticing men into going to the doctor. My answer is: Give us women a break. Why should one adult resort to any of these measures to convince stubborn and irresponsible people to take care of themselves?

Then I read more about the campaign online and discovered a few more details about Markowitz's program. The initiative wasn't just aimed at women. The borough president was being infinitely more politically correct. He urged *anyone* in a romantic relationship—straight, gay or those with multiple partners—to get his or her man to the doctor.

Well, OK, so that made a difference—slightly. But I was still PO'd. (He also didn't ask men to reciprocate and return the favor to their women.) The point is that part of being an adult means making decisions for yourself and not expecting someone else to be responsible or accountable for your life—not even your doctor's appointments.

By that definition, I think what we really need is a campaign called, "Take Yourself to the Doctor."

Can someone please send me a reminder?

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