

Missed something the doctor said? Recording your appointments gives you a chance to go back

March 25 2019, by Amelia Hyatt And Ruby Lipson-Smith



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

You're in a consultation with your doctor and you've just been told you have cancer. You're in shock, and find it difficult to take in anything else the doctor says during the remainder of the appointment.

Research shows receiving bad news can impact people's ability to understand and absorb information. Specifically, it affects [the processing of information](#) and memory formation.

People who are unwell and managing difficult health situations will often find it hard to remember important and complex medical information. This might include their diagnosis, prognosis, treatment plans, appointments, and when to take their medication.

Since the 1970s, researchers have been experimenting with audio recording medical consultations to combat this problem.

Many [studies and reviews since then](#) have found [patients](#) who are given personalised recordings of their medical consultations feel their recall and understanding is improved.

We don't yet have evidence that directly links the recording of medical consultations with improved health outcomes. But we know people who understand and remember important [medical information](#) are [better placed](#) to remember to attend scheduled appointments, to decide on the best treatment options, and to take their medication correctly.

This is commonly referred to as [health literacy](#), and people with higher health literacy are known to have improved [health outcomes](#). So we have good reason to believe recording medical appointments might positively impact people's long-term health.

Could recording your medical appointments benefit you?

While most research around medical consultation recordings has been done with people diagnosed with cancer, the process could help any

person in any medical situation.

People who speak English as a second language find recordings of medical consultations [particularly useful](#).

And consultation recordings are not just useful for patients. Family members and friends often play a significant part in the care of a loved one who is unwell. Recordings give them the opportunity to be involved and informed – even if they cannot attend the appointment in person – as recordings are easily shared.

Patients in a [recent study](#) described using the recording to replay important sections to their family, to remind themselves of words to look up, and to prompt questions to ask their doctor.

In addition, recordings [have been shown](#) to improve patient trust and satisfaction with their doctor.

Health professionals including doctors and nurses believe [consultation recordings benefit patients](#), and improve the care they are able to provide.

Patients have described which appointments they feel are [most useful to record](#). These include appointments at diagnosis of a health condition, appointments where important information is discussed, or appointments where treatment plans are made. Others think recording every appointment would be useful for them.

The great thing about recordings is they are under the control of the patient, so they can be made and used in the way that suits the person best.

Ethical considerations

People are already using their mobile phones to record their doctors' appointments. One study from the UK found [69% of people](#) were interested in recording consultations on their phones.

Although this is usually done with the doctor's permission, [it's sometimes done covertly](#). This [may diminish](#) the trust and openness that should characterise any doctor-patient relationship, and [may even be unlawful](#) in some states.

So you should always seek your doctor's permission before recording.

Importantly, if a health service endorses and provides a means for you to record your medical consultations, the recording is seen as [forming part of your medical record](#).

By law in Australia, hospitals have a responsibility to safely store all parts of your medical record, including copies of [consultation](#) recordings made in this context.

Our team at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre has developed a [smartphone app](#) called [SecondEars](#) as part of a research project. This app will enable patients to record their consultations and share the recordings with family and friends.

Importantly, because this app has been designed to be integrated and supported by hospitals and other [health services](#), once it's implemented in a health service, recordings will be able to be uploaded and saved in the patient's medical record.

Patients will have full control over which appointments they seek to [record](#). It is hoped this service will be made available to health services around Australia in the future.

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