

Pre-Reading Discussion: Do you always understand everything a health professional tells you? What do you do when you don't understand?

This passage is about a man, Sou Ling, who needs to have a medical test called a colonoscopy. He has trouble understanding what the doctor is telling him.

Sou Ling is 46. He grew up in China. He has been in the U.S. for ten years.

Sou Ling went to see a doctor because he was having a problem. Sometimes he had a sharp pain in his lower left belly. Sometimes after he went to the bathroom there was blood on the toilet paper.

Dr. Lee examined Sou Ling. He told him he needed to have a colonoscopy. The doctor said, "I would like you to have a colonoscopy a week from this Friday, at 8:00 in the morning. The test is done at the hospital."

"Why do I have to go into the hospital?" asked Sou Ling. He sounded afraid. He didn't like hospitals.

"Don't worry," said Dr. Lee. "This is a test we do all the time. You will only be at the hospital for a few hours."

"What kind of test is it? Do they take my blood?"

"No," said Dr. Lee. "I want to see what is causing your bleeding and pain. In this test, they will put a

long, thin tube inside you. The tube has a tiny light and a tiny camera lens on the end. The tube can go way up inside your colon. As it goes, we can look around at the inside of your colon. We watch it on a TV screen.”

Sou Ling did not understand. “Dr. Lee, my English is not very good. Can you please tell me again?”

This time Dr. Lee got a picture. It was a drawing of what a colon looks like inside a person. On the picture he drew a line to show where the tube with the tiny light and camera would go. He showed how the tube was connected to a TV screen.

“Oh, now I see,” said Sou Ling. Then he looked afraid again. “This will hurt a lot. You will put me to sleep, right?”

“No,” said Dr. Lee. “It is not painful, just a little uncomfortable. They will give you some medicine to relax you. But you need to have someone drive you home from the hospital, because the medicine will make you a little sleepy. Can you bring someone to drive you home?”

“Yes,” said Sou Ling, “my son can drive me. He is 16 now.”

“Good,” said Dr. Lee. “It’s set for 8:00 a.m. on Friday the 12th. You need to get to the hospital at 7:00 a.m. Now, there are some important things you need to do to get ready for this test.”

Dr. Lee handed Sou Ling two papers. “It is very important to follow all of the instructions on these pages so we don’t have to do the test over. Can you read English OK?”

“Yes, I can read a little. But sometimes I don’t understand everything. I have to get my son to help me,” said Sou Ling. “But I don’t want my son to worry.”

“OK,” said Dr. Lee, “I am going to ask my nurse to go over these instructions with you. She can help you put it all down on a calendar to make it easy to remember the steps. If you still don’t understand, we can call an interpreter for you.”

“Thank you Dr. Lee,” said Sou Ling.

Questions for Discussion:

Can you relate to Sou Ling's experience?

What things might prevent a person who doesn't read or speak English well from asking for help?

Do you ask for help if you don't understand what a health care provider is telling you?