pitfalls of self-diagnosis and treatment

Allergists are physicians who attend medical school for four years, then go through a residency in internal medicine or pediatrics for three years, before undergoing advanced fellowship training in allergy and immunology for two or three years. After having passed an exam, more than all of the allergists on our staff have been certified by the American Board of Allergy and Immunology.

Because of their comprehensive training and experience, Board-certified allergists are uniquely qualified to diagnose and treat allergic and related conditions. Attempts at self-diagnosis can lead to ineffective and even dangerous outcomes.

One of the problems with people diagnosing themselves is that patients can treat themselves for the wrong problems. For example, some people with runny noses and congested noses may self-diagnose allergic rhinitis, but instead may have the much more serious condition of sinusitis. However, what they really could have is non-allergic (vasomotor) rhinitis which responds best to antihistamine pills. However, what they really could have is (hayfever) and medicate themselves with over-the-counter decongestants. Leaving that condition untreated or untreated for too long can lead to respiratory infections, sinusitis, and, potentially, the need for surgery.

Another pitfall with self-diagnosis is that the root cause of an allergic reaction is often not explored or identified to prevent future episodes. While many patients with hives or eczema use over-the-counter antihistamines and steroid creams to improve the flare-ups of these skin conditions, an allergy evaluation by an allergist is able to distinguish between the two conditions.

As another example of dangerous self-diagnosis, a person with sinus headache pain may request antibiotics. However, what they really could have is a non-allergic (vasomotor) rhinitis which responds best to antihistamine pills. Thus, what really could be a non-life-threatening condition is treated with antibiotics, which are ineffective in this condition.

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