



To prevent health care errors, residents are urged to...

Help Prevent Errors in Your Care

Long Term Care



Everyone has a role in making health care safe. That includes doctors, nurses, nursing assistants and technicians. Nursing homes and other post-acute care facilities all across the country are working to make health care safe. You can make your care safer by being an active, involved and informed member of your health care team.

The "Speak Up" program is sponsored by The Joint Commission. They agree that residents should be involved in their own health care. These efforts to increase consumer awareness and involvement are also supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

This program gives simple advice on how you can make health care a good experience. Research shows that residents who take part in decisions about their own health care are more likely to get better faster. To help prevent health care mistakes, residents are urged to "Speak Up."

Speak up if you have questions or concerns. If you still don't understand, ask again. It's your body and you have a right to know.

- Your health is important. Do not be embarrassed if you don't understand something that your doctor, nurse or other health care professional tells you.
- Don't be afraid to ask about safety. For example, if the floor looks shiny ask the staff if it is wet or slippery before walking on it.
- Don't be afraid to tell your caregiver if you think you are about to get the wrong medicine.
- Don't be afraid to tell a health care professional if you think they have confused you with another resident.

Pay attention to the care you get. Make sure you get the right treatments and medicines by the right health care professionals. Don't assume anything.

- Tell a caregiver if something doesn't seem quite right.
- Health care workers should introduce themselves. Look for their identification (ID) badges.
- Notice whether your caregivers have washed their hands. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent infection. Don't be afraid to remind a caregiver to do this.
- Know what time of the day you normally get medicine. If you don't get it, tell your nurse or doctor.
- Make sure your caregiver checks your ID. Make sure they check your wristband and ask your name before giving you your medicine or treatment.

Educate yourself about your condition. Learn about the medical tests you get. Learn about your treatment plan.

- Ask your doctor about the special training and experience that qualifies him or her to treat you. Ask the same questions of other doctors you are referred to.
- Look for information about your condition. Good places to get information are from your doctor, your library, respected websites and support groups.
- Write down information that your doctor tells you. Ask your doctor if he or she has any written information you can keep.
- Read all medical forms. Make sure you understand them before you sign them. If you don't understand ask your doctor or nurse to explain them.

Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate (advisor or supporter).

- Your advocate can ask questions that you may not think about when you are stressed.
- If you go to the hospital, ask this person to stay with you. You will be able to rest better. Your advocate can make sure you get the right medicines and treatments.
- Your advocate can help remember answers to questions you have asked. They can speak up for you when you cannot speak up for yourself.
- Make sure this person understands the care you want. Make sure they know what you want done about life support and other life-saving efforts.
- Read the consents for treatment with your advocate before you sign them. Make sure you both understand exactly what you are agreeing to.

Know what medicines you take. Know why you take them. Medicine errors are the most common health care mistakes.

- Ask why you should take the medicine. Ask for written information about it. Find out its brand and generic names. Ask about the side effects of all medicines.
- If you do not recognize a medicine make sure that it is for you. Ask about medicines that you take by mouth before you swallow them. Read the labels on the bags of intravenous (IV) fluids. If you're not well enough to do this ask your advocate to do it.
- When you get a new medicine tell your doctors and nurses about your allergies. Tell them about any bad reactions you have had to other medicines.
- If you take a lot of medicines ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to take them together. Do the same thing with vitamins, herbs and over-the-counter drugs.

Use a nursing home, hospital, or other health care organization that has been carefully checked out. For example, The Joint Commission visits nursing homes to see if they meet The Joint Commission's quality standards.

- Ask if the health care organization takes care of people with your condition. How often do they perform the treatment or procedure that you need? What special care do they give to help residents get well?
- If you have more than one nursing home to choose from ask your doctor or social worker which one can give you the best care.
- Before you leave the facility ask about follow-up care. Make sure that you understand all of the instructions you're given.

- If you have a computer, go to Quality Check at www.qualitycheck.org to find out if a nursing home or other health care organization is "accredited." This means that the organization works by rules that make sure that patient safety and quality standards are followed.

Participate in all decisions about your treatment. You are the center of the health care team.

- You and your doctor should agree on exactly what will be done during each step of your care.
- Know who will be taking care of you. Find out how long the treatment will last. Know how you should feel.
- Understand that more tests or medicines may not always be better for you. Ask your doctor how a new test or medicine will help.
- If you have copies of results from medical tests, share them with your health care team. This will give them better information about your health history.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you are unsure about the nature of your illness and the best treatment, talk with one or two more doctors. The more information you have about all the kinds of treatment available to you, the better you will feel about the decisions made.
- Ask to speak with others who have had the same treatment you may have to have. They may help you prepare for the days and weeks ahead. They may be able to tell you what to expect and what worked best for them.