

# SpeakUP™

**To prevent health care errors, patients are urged to...**

**Help Prevent Errors in Your Care**

Laboratory Services

# SpeakUP™



Everyone has a role in making health care safe. That includes doctors, nurses, laboratory technologists, phlebotomists (health care staff who take blood), and other health care professionals. Health care organizations 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 patients should be involved in their own health care. These efforts to increase consumer awareness and involvement are 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 patients who take part in decisions about their own health care are more likely to get better faster. To help prevent health care mistakes, patients are urged to “Speak Up.”

**S**peak up if you have questions or concerns. If you 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, quality or how long it takes to get test results.
- Don't be afraid to tell the health care professional if you think they have confused you with another patient.

**P**ay attention to the care you get. Make sure you get the right tests and treatments from the right health care professionals. Don't assume anything.

- Tell your nurse, doctor, lab technologist, phlebotomist, or other health care professional if something doesn't seem quite right.
- Don't be afraid to tell staff if you think you are about to get the wrong test. For example, if you are supposed to get a "potassium test" and the health care professional calls it a "chemistry panel," speak up. Ask your doctor for a copy of your laboratory orders.
- 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 doctor, nurse, or other health care professional to do this.
- Health care professionals should wear gloves when they take blood or samples. Don't be afraid to speak up if the professional does not wear gloves.
- Ask the health care professional if you don't understand what they are doing.
- Make sure the laboratory checks your ID by asking you to say your full name. They may also ask you for your birthday or other identifying information.

- Make sure that your sample is labeled with your full name and another piece of identifying information. Make sure this is done when it is collected.
- Make sure the container with your sample is sealed. Make sure it is sealed at the time it is taken. Is the sample put in a special bag called a biohazard bag? This helps prevent the wrong label from being put on the container. It also helps prevent the container from being broken or mixed in with other samples.
- If you are getting a blood transfusion, make sure the nurse checks your ID before starting.

**E**ducate yourself about your medical tests. Learn about your diagnosis. Learn about your treatment plan.

- Ask your doctor why he or she chose that particular laboratory.
- Prepare for the lab test by asking questions. For example, ask if there are any foods, drinks or medicines that you should not take before the test.
- Write down information that your doctor tells you. Ask your doctor if he or she has any written information you can keep.
- Find out about your test results. Good places to get information—including written information or brochures—are from your doctor and pharmacy.
- 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.

**A**sk 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.
- Ask this person to go with you to the laboratory or to the doctor's office. If you are admitted to the hospital ask them to stay with you—even overnight. Your advocate can make sure you get the right tests, 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.
- Read medical forms with your advocate before you sign them. Make sure you both understand exactly what you are agreeing to.
- Make sure your advocate understands the care you will need when you get home. Your advocate should know what to look for if your condition gets worse. They should also know who to call for help.

**K**now your lab results.

- Before you leave the lab ask about follow-up. When should the lab results be completed? How will you be told about the test results? For example, if there was an abnormal test result, will your doctor be phoned? Will you be called? Or will they mail or e-mail the results?
- Find out how you can get a copy of your lab report.
- Don't assume that no news is good news. Always ask how your results will be sent to you and your doctor. Getting the results quickly is very important.
- Ask for a telephone number to call if you or your doctor have questions.

**U**se a laboratory that has been carefully checked out. For example, The Joint Commission visits laboratories to see if they meet The Joint Commission's quality standards.

- Ask about the lab's experience. How often do they perform the test you need?
- If you have more than one lab or other facility to choose from ask your doctor which one has the best track record for correctness and safety.
- Go to Quality Check at [www.qualitycheck.org](http://www.qualitycheck.org) to find out if a lab 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.

**P**articipate 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, 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 lab test or medicine will help.
- Ask for copies of the results from all lab 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 after your lab tests. If you are unsure about the best treatment for your condition, 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 condition or 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.