



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



Help Prevent Errors in Your Care

Home Care



Everyone has a role in making health care safe. That includes family members, caregivers, doctors and health care professionals. Home care organizations all across the country are working to make health care safe. As the patient, 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 patient 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 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."

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 what your home care professional tells you.
- Don't be afraid to ask about safety.
- Check the label on any medicines that are mailed to your home. Make sure it says the correct drug and dose for you
- Don't be afraid to tell your home care professional if you think you are about to get the wrong medicine or treatment. Or if you have equipment that you don't think you need.
- Don't be afraid to tell your home care professional if you think they have confused you with another patient.

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

- Tell your home care professional if something doesn't seem right.
- Home care workers should introduce themselves. Look for their identification (ID) badges.
- Make sure you or family members know how to use and take care of any medical equipment used in the home. This could be a suction machine, oxygen, or a wheelchair.
- Make sure your home care organization has a 24-hour telephone number that you can call when you have questions or complaints.
- Notice whether home care workers have washed their hands. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent infection. Don't be afraid to remind your caregiver to do this.
- Make sure your home care professional checks your identity. Make sure they do this before giving you medicine or treatment.

Educate yourself about your condition. Learn about the home care services you will get. Learn about your care plan.

- Find out about your condition. Good places to get information are from your doctor, your home care organization, your library, respected websites and support groups.
- Write down information that your doctor tells you about the home care services you need. Ask your doctor if he or she has any written information you can keep.
- Read all forms. Make sure you understand them before you sign them. If you don't understand ask your home care staff person to explain them.
- Do not smoke or let anyone smoke near you if you use oxygen at home.

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.
- Ask this person to be with you during home care visits. Your advocate can make sure you get the right medicines, treatments, and equipment.
- 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.
- Your advocate should know what to look for if your condition gets worse. They should also know who to call for help.

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.
- If you are given an IV ask the nurse how long it should take for the liquid to "run out." Tell the nurse if it seems to be dripping too fast or too slow.
- Your doctors and home care professionals may give you new medicines. Tell them 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.
- Make sure you can read the handwriting on prescriptions written by your doctor. If you can't read it the pharmacist may not be able to either. Ask somebody at the doctor's office to print the prescription.

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

- Ask if the home care organization has taken care of people with your condition. What special care do they give to help patients get well?
- If you have more than one home care organization to choose from ask your doctor which one offers the best care for you.

- Before you are discharged from home care services ask about follow-up care. Make sure that you understand all of the instructions you're given.
- Go to Quality Check at www.qualitycheck.org to find out if a home 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 and the home care services you receive. You are the center of the health care team.

- You and your home care professional should agree on exactly what will be done during each step of your care.
- Know who will be taking care of you. Know what services you will receive. Find out how long the treatment will last. Know how you should feel.
- Understand that more treatments or medicines may not always be better for you. Ask your home care professional how a new treatment or medicine will help.