

SpeakUP™

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

Everyone has a role in making health care safe. That includes family members, caregivers, doctors and health care professionals. Home care agencies 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. 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 people who take part in their health care decisions are more likely to get better faster. To help prevent health care mistakes, you are urged to “Speak Up.”

Help Prevent Errors in Your Care

Home Care

SpeakUP™

The Joint Commission is the largest health care accrediting body in the United States that promotes quality and safety.

Helping health care organizations help patients

Speak up if you have questions or concerns. If you still do not understand, ask again. It is your body and you have a right to know.

- ❑ Your health is important. Do not be embarrassed if you do not understand what the home care professional tells you.
- ❑ Tell the home care professional you do not understand. Ask more questions to help them understand what you need. Tell them if you need someone who speaks your language or who knows sign language to explain the information to you.

Pay attention to the care you get. Make sure you get the right treatments and medicines by the right home care professional. Do not assume anything.

- ❑ Ask for a list of the professionals who will visit your home. When will they visit? Can they give you a copy of their schedule?
- ❑ Home care professionals should introduce themselves when they come to your home. Look for their identification (ID) badge.
- ❑ Make sure the home care professional washes his or her hands. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent infection. Do not be afraid to remind them.
- ❑ Do not be afraid to tell them if you think they have confused you with someone else. Tell them if you think you are getting the wrong medicine or treatment.
- ❑ Make sure you or your family members know how to use and take care of the equipment. This could be an oxygen concentrator, nebulizer, infusion pump, or wheelchair.
- ❑ Ask if the home care agency has a phone number to call if you have questions. Can you talk to someone 24-hours a day, seven days a week?
- ❑ If you use an oxygen machine, do not smoke or let anyone smoke near you. Do not light candles. Oxygen makes a fire burn hotter and faster.

Educate yourself about your condition, medical tests and treatment plan.

- ❑ Learn about your condition. Good places to get information are from your home care professional, your doctor, respected websites, your library, and support groups.
- ❑ Ask about your plan of care. What treatments, medicines, services, and equipment will be provided? How long will you receive care?
- ❑ Ask for written information you can keep.
- ❑ Understand that more treatments or medicines may not always be better. Ask your home care professional how a new treatment or medicine will help.

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

- ❑ Ask your advocate to come with you when you go to the doctor. They can help write down what the doctor says. They can ask questions you may not think about. They can speak up when you cannot.
- ❑ Make sure your advocate understands the care you want. Make sure they know your wishes for life support and other life-saving efforts.
- ❑ Your advocate can be with you during home care visits. They can make sure you get the right medicines, treatments, and equipment.
- ❑ Read the consent forms before you sign them. Ask your advocate to read them. Make sure you both understand what you are agreeing to. If you do not, ask your doctor or nurse to explain.

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

- ❑ When you get a new medicine, 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.
- ❑ Tell your doctors and nurses about your allergies. Tell them about any reactions you have had to other medicines.
- ❑ If you get a written prescription, make sure you can read it. If you cannot, the pharmacist may not be able to read it. Ask for a printed prescription.
- ❑ Check the label on medicines sent to your home. Make sure your name, the medicine name, and the dose are correct. If you do not recognize a medicine, contact your pharmacy. Ask that they confirm the medicine with your doctor.
- ❑ Ask about medicines that you take by mouth before you swallow them.
- ❑ Do not be afraid to speak up if you think you are about to be given the wrong medicine.
- ❑ Tell your home care professional if you:
 - Are having trouble giving yourself medicine
 - Cannot remember to take your medicine
 - Feel worse after taking your medicine
- ❑ Read the labels on the bags of intravenous (IV) fluids. If you cannot do this, ask your advocate to read the label.
- ❑ Ask the nurse how long it should take for liquid to “run out” of an IV. Tell the nurse if it seems to be dripping too fast or too slow.
- ❑ Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to take different medicines at the same time. Include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, and herbal supplements.

Use a home care agency that has been carefully evaluated. For example, home care agencies accredited by The Joint Commission have been reviewed against a set of standards designed to help them deliver safe, high quality home care services.

- ❑ Ask your home care professional what experience they have taking care of people with your condition.
- ❑ Ask your doctor to suggest a home care agency that has a good track record for your condition. What special services do they provide?
- ❑ Before you are discharged from home care services, ask about follow-up care. Make sure you and your advocate understand the instructions.
- ❑ Is the home care agency “accredited?” Accredited means that the agency follows rules for patient safety and quality. Go to Quality Check® at www.qualitycheck.org to find Joint Commission accredited home care services.

Participate in 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 what will be done during each step of your care.
- ❑ Know who will be taking care of you. Know what services you will receive and how often you will receive them. Find out how long treatment will last. Ask how you should feel.
- ❑ Tell your home care professional if something does not seem right.