

SpeakUP

HELP PREVENT ERRORS IN YOUR CARE

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE

Everyone has a role in making behavioral health care safe — including administrators, psychologists, social workers and counselors. Behavioral health care organizations across the country are working to make safety a priority. You and your family members or significant other can also play a vital role in making behavioral care safe by becoming active, involved and informed members of the care team.

An Institute of Medicine (IOM) report has identified the occurrence of medical errors as a serious problem in the health care system. The IOM recommends, among other things, that a concerted effort be made to improve the public's awareness of the problem.

The "Speak Up" program, sponsored by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, urges individuals to get involved in their care, treatment or services. Such efforts to increase consumer awareness and involvement are supported by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. This initiative provides simple advice on how you, as the individual being served, can make your care a positive experience.

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Joint Commission
on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
Setting the Standard for Quality in Health Care

Speak up if you have questions or concerns, and if you don't understand, ask again.

- Your well being is too important to worry about being embarrassed if you don't understand something that staff tells you.
- Don't be afraid to ask about safety.
- Don't be afraid to tell staff if you think you are about to receive the wrong medication.
- Let staff know about interventions that have worked for you in the past.

Pay attention to the care you or your loved one is receiving. Make sure you're getting the right treatment, care or services by the right behavioral health care professionals. Don't assume anything.

- Tell staff or their supervisor if something doesn't seem quite right.
- Know what time of day you normally receive a medication. If it doesn't happen, bring this to the attention of your direct care staff.
- Make sure your staff confirms your identity, that is, asks your name, before he or she administers any medication.

Educate yourself about your, your family member's or significant other's care, treatment, or service plan.

- Ask staff about their qualifications.
- Gather information about your, your family member's or significant other's condition or problem from people who have had similar experiences. Good sources include direct care staff, the library, respected websites and support groups.
- Write down important facts staff tells you, so that you can look for additional information later. And ask the staff if they have any written information you can keep.
- Thoroughly read all forms and make sure you understand them before you sign anything. If you don't understand, ask the staff to explain them.

Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate.

- Your advocate can ask questions that you may not think of while you are under stress.
- Your advocate can also help remember answers to questions you have asked, and speak up for you if you cannot.
- Review consents for care, treatment, or service with your advocate before you sign them and make sure you both understand exactly what you are agreeing to.
- Your advocate should know what to look for if your needs change and whom to call for help.
- Ask staff about a crisis telephone number available in your community.

Know what medications you take and why you take them. Medication errors are the most common health care mistakes.

- Ask about the purpose of the medication and ask for written information about it, including its brand and generic names. Also inquire about the side effects of the medication.
- If you do not recognize a medication, verify that it is for you. If you're not well enough to do this, ask your advocate to do this.
- Whenever you are going to receive a new medication, tell your doctor about allergies you have, or negative reactions you have had to medications in the past.
- If you are taking multiple medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to take those medications together. This holds true for vitamins, herbal supplements and over-the-counter drugs, too.
- Make sure you can read the handwriting on any prescriptions written by your doctor. If you can't read it, the pharmacist may not be able to either.

Use a behavioral health care facility, program or service that has undergone a rigorous on-site evaluation against established, state-of-the-art quality and safety standards, such as that provided by the Joint Commission.

- Ask about the behavioral health care organization's experience in serving people with your needs, problem or condition.
- Before you leave the behavioral health care facility, ask about continuing treatment, care or services and make sure you understand instructions on how to access follow-up treatment, care or services.

- Go to Quality Check at www.qualitycheck.org to find out whether your behavioral health care organization is accredited.

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

- You and your staff should agree on the steps and anticipated time frame of your treatment, care or service.
- Know who will be taking care of you and the expected goals or outcomes of your treatment, care or service.
- Speak up about your personal goals. These may be in addition to the goals and outcomes outlined by your care or service providers.
- Don't be afraid to seek a second opinion. If you are unsure about the nature of your condition and the best treatment, care or service, consult with one or two additional specialists. The more information you have about the options available to you, the more confident you will be in the decisions made.