

SpeakUP

HELP PREVENT ERRORS IN YOUR CARE

HOME CARE

Everyone has a role in making health care safe — family members, caregivers, physicians and health care professionals. Home care organizations across the country are working to make health care safety a priority. You, as the patient, can also play a vital role in making your care safe by becoming an active, involved and informed member of your health 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 patients to get involved in their care. 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 patient, can make your care a positive experience. After all, research shows that patients who take part in decisions about their health care are more likely to have better outcomes.

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

SpeakUP



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. It's your body and you have a right to know.

- Your health is too important to worry about being embarrassed if you don't understand something that your home care professional tells you.
- Don't be afraid to ask about safety. If you're receiving medications mailed to your home, always check the label for the correct drug and dose.
- Don't be afraid to tell your home care professional if you think you are about to receive the wrong medication or therapy, or if you have received a piece of equipment that you don't think you need.
- Don't hesitate to tell your home care professional if you think he or she has confused you with another patient.

Pay attention to the care you are receiving. Make sure you're getting the right treatments and medications by the right home care staff. Don't assume anything.

- Tell your home care professional if something doesn't seem quite right.
- Expect home care workers to introduce themselves when they enter your home and look for their identification badges.
- If medical equipment such as a suction machine, oxygen or wheelchair is used, make sure you or responsible family members have been taught to use and care for the equipment in the home.
- Make sure your home care organization has a 24-hour telephone number 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 the spread of infections. Don't be afraid to gently remind your caregiver to do this.

- Make sure your home care professional confirms your identity before he or she administers any medication or treatment.

Educate yourself about your diagnosis, the services the home care organization will be providing to you, and your care plan.

- Gather information about your condition. Good sources include your doctor, your home care organization, your library, respected websites and support groups.
- Write down important facts your doctor tells you about the home care services you will be receiving, so that you can look for additional information later. And ask your doctor if he or she has 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 your home care staff person to explain them.
- Make sure you are familiar with the operation of any equipment that is being used in your home. If you will be using oxygen at home, do not smoke or allow anyone to smoke near you while oxygen is in use.

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.
- Ask this person to be with you during home care visits. Your advocate can help to make sure you get the right medications, equipment and treatments.
- Your advocate can also help remember answers to questions you have asked, and speak up for you if you cannot.

- Make sure this person understands your preferences for care and your wishes concerning resuscitation and life support.
- Review consents for treatment 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 condition is getting worse and whom to call for help.

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. Ask about oral medications before swallowing, and read the contents of bags of intravenous (IV) fluids. If you're not well enough to do this, ask your advocate to do this.
- 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 doesn't seem to be dripping properly (that it is too fast or too slow).
- Whenever you are going to receive a new medication, tell your doctors and home care professionals 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 home care organization 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 home care organization's experience in treating your type of illness. What specialized care do they provide in helping 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 and make sure that you understand all of the instructions.
- Go to Quality Check at www.qualitycheck.org to find out whether your home care organization is accredited by the Joint Commission.

Participate in all decisions about your treatment and the home care services you are receiving. You are the center of the health care team.

- You and your home care organization should agree on what will be done during each step of your care.
- Know who will be taking care of you, what services you will be receiving, how long the treatment will last, and how you should feel.
- Understand that more treatments or medications may not always be better. Ask your home care professional what a new treatment or medication is likely to achieve.