



## FOR BETTER AND SAFER HEALTHCARE

Everyone has a role in making health care safe. That includes doctors, nurses, individuals receiving supports and services, service coordinators and direct support staff and providers. You can make your care safer by being an active, involved and informed member of the health care team. Medical mistakes are a serious problem in the health care system. In addition, people with disabilities are at higher risk for receiving health care that is less than adequate, particularly if they or the person representing them is uninformed or not trained to represent individuals at health care appointments.

Research shows that patients who take part in informed decisions about their own health care are more likely to get better faster. You can make health care safer and more effective by being an active, involved and informed member of the health care team.

The **Speak Up** campaign was developed by the Joint Commission, an organization committed to healthcare safety. This guide provides simple advice on how you can make health care a good experience.

### **Speak Up if you have questions or concerns. If you still don't understand, ask again.**

- Your health (and the health of the individual) is very important. Do not worry about being embarrassed if you do not understand something the doctor, nurse or other health professional has said.
- Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or doctor if you think you are about to get the wrong medication or if you have taken a medication in the past that has not worked for you.
- Don't be afraid to tell a health care professional if you think he or she has confused you with another patient.

### **Pay attention to the care you get. Always make sure you're getting the right treatments and medicines by the right health care professional (including pharmacists). Don't assume anything.**

- Tell your nurse or doctor if something "doesn't seem right" sometimes you don't know exactly what's wrong, but your "intuition" is important
- Expect health care workers to introduce themselves
- Notice whether your caregivers have washed their hands. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent infections. Don't be afraid to remind a nurse or doctor to do this.

### **Educate yourself about your illness. Learn about the medical tests you get, and your treatment plan.**

- Ask your doctor about the special training and experience that qualifies him or her to treat your illness.
- Look for information about your condition. Good places to get that information are from your doctor, your library, respected websites and support groups.
- Write down important facts your doctor tells you. Ask your doctor if he or she has any written information you can keep.
- Read all medical forms and make sure you understand them. If you do not understand, ask your doctor or nurse to explain the.

### **Ask a trusted family member, friend or advisor to be your advocate.**

- Your advocate can ask questions that you may not think about when you are stressed.
- Ask this person to stay with you, even overnight, when you are hospitalized. Your advocate can help make sure you get the right medicines and treatments.
- Make sure your advocate understands the kind of care you want.
- Make sure your advocate understand the type of care you will need when you get home.



- Your advocate should know what to look for if your condition is getting worse. He or she should also know who to call for help.

### **Know what medicines you take and why you take them.**

- Ask about why you should take the medication. Ask for written information about it, including its brand and generic names. Also ask about the side effects of all medicines.
- If you do not recognize a medication, double check that it is for you.
- Whenever you get a new medicine, tell your doctors and nurses about allergies you have, or negative reactions have had to other medications.
- If you are taking a lot of medicines, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to take those medicines 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 cannot read it, the pharmacist may not be able to either. Ask someone at the doctor's office to print the prescription, if necessary.

**Use a hospital, clinic, surgery center or other type of health care organization that has been carefully checked. Many settings have been reviewed and found to meet quality standards by national organizations; others have not.**

- If you have more than one hospital or clinic to choose from, ask your doctor which one has the best care for your condition.
- Before you leave the hospital or other facility, ask about follow-up care and make sure that you understand all of the instructions.

### **Participate in all decisions about your treatment. The patient is at 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. Know how long the treatment will last. Know how you should feel.
- Understand that more tests or medications may not always be better for you. Ask your doctor how a new test or medication will help.
- Keep copies of your medical records from previous hospital stays and from previous doctor's appointments and share them with your health care team. This will give them better information about your health history.
- Do not be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you are unsure about the best treatment for your illness, talk with one or two additional 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 treatment or operation you may have to have. They may be able to tell you what to expect and what worked best for them.

**SpeakUP™**

**RESOURCES: The Joint Commission:**  
<http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp/>

