

Speak Up For Your Safety *

Everyone has a role in making health care safe—physicians, nurses, health care executives, and technicians.

You, as the patient and a partner in clinical research, play a vital role in making the care you receive safe. You must be an active, informed, and vocal member of your health care team.

Speak up if you have questions or concerns about your care or the protocol in which you are enrolled. If you don't understand, ask again. You have a right to know!

- ▶ Make sure your doctor or your nurse asks your name and your date of birth before giving you medications or treatments.
- ▶ Ask your care providers about the training and experience that qualifies them to treat you.
- ▶ Don't hesitate to tell your health care professional if you think he or she has confused you with another patient.
- ▶ Tell your nurse or doctor if something about your care just doesn't seem right to you.

Pay attention to the care you receive. Make sure you get the right treatments and medications by the right health care professional.

- ▶ Don't be afraid to ask your doctors, nurses or other care providers to wash their hands before and after they care for you.
- ▶ Ask about safety. For instance, ask the doctor to mark the area that will be operated on so that there is no confusion.

- ▶ Make sure health care workers introduce themselves when they enter your room. Look at their identification badges.

Educate yourself about your diagnosis, the research protocol in which you are enrolled, and all medical tests you are undergoing.

- ▶ Learn about your disease. Get information from your healthcare team, your library, respected websites, and support groups.
- ▶ Learn about the medical tests you get and your treatment plan.
- ▶ Make sure you know about the operation of any equipment that is used in your care.

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

- ▶ Your advocate can ask questions that you may not think about when you are under stress.
- ▶ Your advocate can also help remember answers to questions you have asked and can speak up for you if you cannot.
- ▶ Make sure this person understands your advance directives preference—for example, your decisions about resuscitation and life support.

* Adapted from the publication, "To prevent healthcare errors, patients are urged to...Speak Up," by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations www.jcaho.org

- ▶ Review consents for treatment with your advocate before you sign them. Make sure both of you understand exactly what you are agreeing to.
- ▶ Make sure your advocate understands the type of care you will need when you go home.

Know the medications you take and understand why you take them.

- ▶ Carry an up-to-date list of medicines you are taking in your wallet or purse.
- ▶ Ask about the purpose of your medications.
- ▶ Ask for written information about them.
- ▶ Know what time of day you normally receive a medication. If you don't get it at the usual time, tell your nurse or doctor.
- ▶ If you do not recognize a medication, make sure that it is for you before you take it.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or the doctor if you think you are getting the wrong medication.
- ▶ If you are given intravenous (I.V.) fluids, ask the nurse how long it should take for the fluid to "run out."
- ▶ Whenever you are to receive a new medication, tell your nurses and doctors about allergies you have.
- ▶ Make sure you can read the handwriting on all prescriptions. If you can't read it, the pharmacist may not be able to, either!

Understand all informed consent documents or other medical forms you are asked to sign.

- ▶ Read all informed consent documents and other medical forms and make sure you understand them before you sign anything.

Participate in all decisions about your care and treatment. You are the center of the healthcare team!

- ▶ You and your doctors should agree on exactly what will be done during each step of your care.
- ▶ Know that you can stop participation in your research protocol at any time.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion.
- ▶ Ask to speak to other patients who are on your protocol or who have had the procedure you are undergoing.

This information is prepared specifically for persons taking part in clinical research at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and may not apply to patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your health care team.

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