



Patient Safety Awareness Week: March 7-13, 2004

What You Can Do to Make Healthcare Safer: A Consumer Tip Sheet

If a medical error occurs, it is often a result of a series of small failures that are individually not big enough to cause an accident, but combined can result in an error. Patients can ensure a safer experience with the health care system by being involved and informed about their treatment. Improving patient safety requires continuous

learning and constant communication between caregivers, organizations, and patients. Everyone has a role in patient safety, and everyone will benefit from its successes.

What can consumers do to make sure they have a safer experience with the health care system?

The MPSC suggests these steps to help make your health care experience safer:

Become a more informed health care consumer:

- Seek information about illnesses or conditions that affect you and possible treatment options.
- Ask questions of your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or any other care team member.

Keep track of your history and carry it with you:

- Write down your medical history including any medical conditions you have, illnesses, immunizations, allergies, hospitalizations, all medications and dietary supplements you're taking, the dose and reason you are taking the medication and any reactions or sensitivities you've experienced. Keep this list updated and in your wallet. MPSC members have ready-made wallet cards available for this purpose.
- Write down the names and phone numbers of your doctors, clinics, and pharmacies for quick reference.

Work with your doctor and other health care professionals as a team:

- Share your health history and up-to-date information about your care with everyone who's treating you.
- Make sure you understand the care and treatment you'll be receiving. Ask questions if you're not clear on your care.
- When at the hospital or clinic, members of your care team may ask you for identifying information, like your name and address, on numerous occasions, such as prior to administering any medications or performing procedures. Provide this information each time and do not be afraid to prompt your care team members to check this information prior to administering any medications or performing procedures. This system of checks and double checks is designed to help keep you safe.
- Infections can occur after certain types of medical procedures, like surgery. Wash your hands carefully after handling any type of soiled material or going to the bathroom. Since you are part of your healthcare team, do not be afraid to inquire whether doctors and nurses have washed or disinfected their hands with a waterless gel before working with you.
- Pay attention. If something doesn't seem right, call it to the attention of your doctor or health care professional.
- Discuss any concerns about your safety with your health care team.

Involve a family member or friend in your care:

- If you're not able to observe or participate fully in your care, ask a family member or friend to assist. They can accompany you, help ask questions, understand instructions and suggest your preferences.

Follow the treatment plan agreed upon by you and your doctor:

- Be sure you receive all instructions verbally and in writing that you can read and understand. Ask questions about any instructions that are confusing or unclear.
- Report anything unusual to your doctor.

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Adapted from National Patient Safety Foundation Fact Sheets