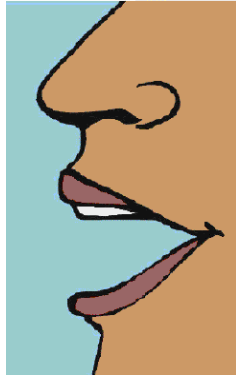


SpeakUP - Help Prevent Errors in Your Care Part 2



Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate (advisor or supporter).

- 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. You will be able to rest better. Your advocate can help make sure you get the right medicines and treatments.

- Your advocate can also help remember answers to questions you have asked. He or she can speak up for you when you cannot speak up for yourself.



- Make sure this person understands the kind of care you want. Make sure he or she knows what you want done about life support and other life-saving efforts if you are unconscious and not likely to get better.
- Go over the consents for treatment with your advocate before you sign them. Make sure you both understand exactly what you are about to agree to.
- Make sure your advocate understands 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. Medicine errors are the most common health care mistakes.

- 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 medicine, double-check that it is for you. Ask about medicines that you are to take by mouth before you swallow them. Read the contents of the bags of intravenous (IV) fluids. If you're not well enough to do this, ask your advocate to do it.

- 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 right (too fast or too slow).

- Whenever you get a new medicine, tell your doctors and nurses about allergies you have, or negative reactions you have had to other medicines.



- 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 can't read it, the pharmacist may not be able to either. Ask somebody at the doctor's office to print the prescription, if necessary.

- Carry an up-to-date list of the medicines you are taking in your purse or wallet. Write down how much you take and when you take it. Go over the list with your doctor and other caregivers.

Use a hospital, clinic, surgery center, or other type of health care organization that has been carefully checked out. For example, The Joint Commission visits hospitals to see if they are meeting The Joint Commission's quality standards.



- Ask about the health care organization's experience in taking care of people with your type of illness. How often do they

perform the procedure you need? What special care do they provide to help patients get well?

- If you have more than one hospital 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.

- Go to Quality Check at www.qualitycheck.org to find out whether your hospital or other health care organization is "accredited." Accredited means that the hospital or health care organization works by rules that make sure that patient safety and quality standards are followed.

Participate in all decisions about your treatment. You are 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 share them with your health care team. This will give them better information about your health history.

- Don't 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 help you prepare for the days and weeks ahead. They may be able to tell you what to expect and what worked best for them.

- Talk to your doctor and your family about your wishes regarding resuscitation and other life-saving actions.

Text from the "SpeakUP" series by the Joint Commission.

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