

Title: General Information

Subtitle: Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors From the Health Care Providers.

Second Subtitle: Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors From the Health Care Providers.

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Date: 1175027686

URL: http://www.tcach.org/site/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=30

Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors From the Health Care Providers.

Medical errors are one of the Nation's leading causes of death and injury. What are Medical Errors?

Medical errors happen when something that was planned as a part of medical care does not work out, or when the wrong plan was used in the first place. Medical errors happen in hospitals, health care systems, and homes.

- Clinics.
- Outpatient Surgery Centers.
- Doctors' Offices.
- Nursing Homes.
- Pharmacies.
- Patients' Homes can involve medicines.
- Surgery.
- Diagnosis.
- Equipment.

They can happen during even the most routine tasks, such as when a patient on a salt-free diet is given a high-salt meal.

Most errors result from problems created by today's complex health care system. They happen when doctors and their patients have problems communicating. For example, a doctor supported by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) found that doctors do not do enough to help their patients make informed decisions. Uninvolved patients are less likely to accept the doctor's choice of treatment and less likely to

make the treatment work.

What Can You Do? Be Involved in Your Health Care.

1. The single most important way you can help to prevent errors is to be involved in your health care. This means taking part in every decision about your health care. That patients who are more involved with their care tend to get better results. Based on the latest scientific evidence about what works best, follow.

2. Make sure that all of your doctors know about everything you are taking. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and dietary supplements. At least once a year, bring all of your medicines and supplements with you to your doctor. "Bagging" your medicines can help you and your doctor talk about them and solve any problems. It can also help your doctor keep your records up to date, which improves the quality of your care.

3. Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies and adverse reactions you have had to medicines. This can help you avoid getting a medicine that could harm you. When your doctor writes you a prescription, make sure you can read and understand the doctor's handwriting, your pharmacist might be able to help. 4. Ask for information about your medicines in terms you can understand both when your medicines are prescribed and when you receive them. What is the medicine for?

- How am I supposed to take it, and for how long?

--What side effects are likely? What do I do if they occur?

--Is this medicine safe to take with other medicines or dietary supplements?

--What food, drink, or activities should I avoid?

When you pick up your medicine from the pharmacy, ask: Is this the medicine that my doctor prescribed? The Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences found that 70 percent of the medicine errors involved the wrong drug, dose, or directions on your medicine label. Medicine labels can be hard to understand. For example, ask if "four doses daily" means taking a dose every 6 hours or every 8 hours. Ask your pharmacist for the best device to measure liquid medicines. Also, ask questions if you're not sure how to use it. Research shows that many people do not understand the right way to measure liquid medicines. For example, many use teaspoons, which often do not hold a true teaspoon of liquid. Special devices help people to measure the right dose. Being told how to use a device for written information about the side effects of your medicine can help you know what to watch for. If you know what to watch for, you will be better prepared if it does happen, or if something unexpected happens, you can report the problem right away and get help before it gets worse. Written information about medicines can help patients recognize problems and share that information to their doctors.

Hospital Stay If you have a choice, choose a hospital at which many patients have the procedure you need. Research shows that patients tend to have better results when they are treated in hospitals that have experience with their procedure. If you are in a hospital, consider asking all the staff who have direct contact with you whether they have washed their hands. Hand washing is an important way to prevent the spread of infections in hospitals. Yet, it is not always done thoroughly enough. A recent study found that when patients checked whether the workers washed their hands, the workers washed their hands more often. When you are being discharged from the hospital, ask your doctor to explain the instructions for use at home. This includes learning about your medicines and finding out what you can do with your regular activities. Research shows that at discharge time, doctors do not always understand more than they really do about what they should or should not do at home.

Surgery If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your doctor, and the hospital all agree and are clear on exactly what will be done. Doing surgery at the wrong site (for example, operating on the left knee instead of the right) is rare. But even when it happens, that wrong-site surgery is 100 percent preventable. The American Academy of Surgeons urges its members to sign their initials directly on the site to be operated on.

Other Steps You Can Take Speak up if you have questions or concerns. You have a right to question anyone who is involved in your care. Make sure that someone, such as your personal doctor, is in charge of your care. This is especially important if you have many health problems or are in a hospital. Make sure that all health professionals involved in your care have important health information. Do not assume that everyone knows everything you need to know. Ask a family member or friend to be there with you and to help you with things (someone who can help get things done and speak up if you think you can't do it). If you don't need help now, you might need it later. It is always better to know what "more" is. It is a good idea to find out why a test or treatment is needed and how it can help you. If you have a test, don't assume that a good result means you are cured. Learn about your condition and treatments by asking your doctor and using other reliable sources. Ask your doctor if your treatment is based on the latest research.

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