



Patient Safety: A Guide for Patients

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Introduction

Medical and surgical advancements have taken a giant leap forward in the last few decades. The good news is that we now have treatments for diseases and injuries that were never before possible. The bad news is that as health care becomes more complex, there is a higher risk of error.

Patient safety is a priority in health care organizations throughout the country. Every member of your health care team has a responsibility towards this goal – including you, the patient! That's right, YOU are a member of your health care team. Patients that take an active role in their health care have better outcomes, and the more information patients have, the better they can decide what is best for them.

When errors occur, they are usually caused by problems created by our complex health care system. The other main reason for errors occurring is poor communication. The most important thing you can do to prevent errors is to be an active member of your health care team!



Your Hospital Stay

While you are in the hospital, pay attention to the health care you receive. **SPEAK UP IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS!** You have the right to question anyone involved in your health care. Be sure that you discuss any concerns about your safety with your nurses or other caregivers.



Expect your caregivers to introduce themselves to you and to be wearing identification badges. You should be able to tell what their job title is, for example, a registered nurse, nurse's aide, physical therapist, etc.



Make sure that you understand your plan of care. Ask your nurse or doctor to explain what treatments or procedures are planned for you. If you don't understand, ask questions.

Be sure that your health care professionals check your wristband, ask your name and check another form of identification, such as your medical record

Preparing for Surgery

If you need surgery, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Be sure you understand what is going to be done. Ask your doctor to explain the surgery in terms that you understand and don't be afraid to ask for another opinion.

Also ask your doctor if there are any alternatives to surgery, what the benefits and the risks of having surgery are, and what might happen if you don't have the surgery.

When you understand the procedure and if you agree to the surgery, ask your doctor who will be in charge of taking care of you during your recovery. Usually, it is the surgeon who is responsible for the care of the patient after a surgical procedure. Make sure you ask questions about the expected good results and possible bad results. Ask how long it will take to recover and if there will be any restrictions on your activities and if so, for how long. You should also ask how your pain will be controlled after surgery.

When the anesthesiologist visits you prior to the surgery, tell him or her if you have any allergies - don't assume that he or she knows because you told other caregivers. It's also very important to tell the anesthesiologist if you or a family member has ever experienced a bad reaction to an anesthetic.

On the day of surgery, expect your nurse and surgeon to ask you about the procedure you will be having and on which side, if that question is applicable to your surgery. For example, if you are having knee surgery, they will ask you if it is on the right or left knee. If you were having surgery on your gall bladder or on your appendix, that question would not be relevant to your particular case. If the right or left side IS relevant, the doctor or nurse, with your help, should mark the correct side.



Remember, you are an important part of the health care team.