
Taking Steps for Safe Health Care

Medical errors occur in the health care system and are one of the primary causes of death and injury in the United States. These errors can involve many things; such as, medication, reports, diet, equipment, or diagnosis. Although government agencies and others are working together to create a safer health care system for the public, there are steps you can take to ensure your health safety.

Where do Medical Errors occur?

Medical errors can happen anywhere you receive health care; for example, your doctor's office, the drug store or pharmacy, outpatient care centers, clinics, even in your own home.

What can you do?

1. Take an active part in your health care – take part in your doctor's discussion about your care. Ask questions.
2. Tell your doctor about all the medicine you are taking, including any non-prescription medicines; such as, aspirin, cough medicine, vitamins and herbs.
3. Remind your doctor of allergies or reactions you may have had in the past.
4. Make sure you can read the prescriptions the doctor has given you. If you can't read it, it is possible the pharmacist can't read it either.
 - a. Ask for detailed information about the prescription(s) you are given; such as, how long should I take it, can I eat with it, what is the medicine for?
 - b. When you pick up your medicine, check again with the pharmacist to make sure it is the correct medicine and make sure the pharmacist knows all the prescription and non-prescription medicine you are taking.
 - c. Get directions on how to take medications, how to measure it, and what are the possible side effects.
5. Always ask the doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care worker questions if you don't understand or you have concerns about your care.
6. Don't assume your test is normal if you don't hear anything.
7. Learn about your illness and possible treatments and discuss them with your doctor.
8. If you need surgery, make sure you know exactly what to expect, who will be taking care of you, how long it will take to get better.
9. If you have the option, pick a hospital or facility that frequently performs the surgery you need or frequently treats patients with your illness.
10. More is not always better – ask questions about a test or treatment and how it can or cannot help you.

These are a few suggestions on things “you” can do to stay safe in today's health care. For more information, you may want to visit the following government sponsored websites:

<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/20tips.htm>

<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/5steps.htm>

<http://www.ahrq.gov/research/medication.htm>