

Your Role in Receiving Quality Patient Care

General Information

You can take an active role in assuring that you receive quality care from your health care providers by:

- getting information you need during doctor visits
- understanding tests and treatments
- knowing how to prevent medical errors.

Getting Information You Need

The more you know about your health care, the better chance you will receive the best care for your situation and avoid medical errors. Here are some ways to get the information you need during doctor visits.

- Have one health care provider be in charge of your overall care who can talk with you about all of your health. This is very important if you see more than one health care provider, have several health problems or are in a hospital.
- Make sure the health care provider you are seeing has all the important health information about you so he or she can answer questions correctly.
- Write down any questions or concerns you have. Bring a pen and paper to your visit to record the answers and other information.

- Consider asking someone to go to doctor visits with you. That person can help write down information or ask questions for you.
- If your health care provider prescribes medical equipment for you, ask who will teach you how to use it properly.
- Ask your health care provider to word medical information or terms in a way that you can understand. Ask questions and state your concerns.

Understanding Tests and Treatments

If your health care provider orders tests or treatments, you may wish to ask questions about them.

- Ask why a test or treatment is needed and how it can help you. Find out what will happen if you don't have it or if there are other tests or treatments you could have instead.
- Find out when test results will be available and how you will receive them. Mark the date on a calendar. If you don't receive test results when you should, call the doctor's office and ask about them.

Preventing Medical Errors

You are the best person to prevent medical errors from happening to you.

Medical errors can happen in a hospital or a doctor's office, or even in your own home. They can involve medicines, surgery, a diagnosis, medical equipment or lab reports.

The best way you can help prevent medical errors from happening to you is to be an active member of your health care team. This means being involved in every part of your health care.

- Speak up if you have questions or concerns or if you don't understand something. Expect to get answers in words you understand.
- Know how to take medicines correctly. Some of the most common medical errors involve medicines, both prescribed and over-the-counter products, including vitamins and herbs.
- Know how much medicine to take when, what the side effects are and if the medicine could interact harmfully with anything else you take. This includes over-the-counter products.

Information adapted from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.