

# KEEPING YOUR FAMILY SAFE FROM MEDICAL ERRORS



## A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH AND INJURY IN THE US

Errors occur not only in **hospitals** but in other health care settings, such as

**physicians' offices, nursing homes, pharmacies, urgent care centers, and care delivered in the home.**

### ***SPEAK UP QUICKLY:***

Don't hesitate to let the doctor know you aren't getting better and/or you are getting worse

### ***WATCH FOR MEDICAL MISTAKES IN A NICE WAY***

*Try not to insult the people that are caring for you in the process*

*... No one can be perfect every minute of every day. Mistakes will always happen. We are all human.*

## Common Causes of Medical Errors

While your medical providers are generally well trained, skilled and caring, the system is complex and there are many “opportunities” for errors:

### EMPHASIS on VOLUME:

- Disorganized work flow - frequent interruptions and distractions;
- Fatigued and stressed staff;
- Improper technician training;
- Inadequate staffing

### COMMUNICATION errors:

- Medical providers not knowing what drugs and supplements the patient is taking.
- Incomplete information on patient (allergies, lab results etc.)
- Drug interacting with other drugs
- Drug given to wrong patient
- Incorrect diagnosis

### PRESCRIPTION errors:

- Drug incorrectly prescribed by doctor
- Drug incorrectly read or prepared by pharmacist<sup>1</sup>
- Wrong drug or dose given<sup>1</sup>
- Missed dose
- Drug given for longer or shorter durations than intended

- Drug taken at wrong time
- Drugs incorrectly recorded
- Drug storage errors (e.g. not refrigerated, exposed to light/moisture)
- Counterfeit drug

<sup>1</sup> Poor handwriting; confusion between drugs with similar name, color, or shape; misuse of zeroes and decimal points; confusion of metric and other units; inappropriate abbreviations, inappropriate labeling as a drug is prepared and repackaged into smaller units; environmental factors, such as lighting, heat, noise; interruptions that can distract health professionals from their medical tasks.

<http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/MedErrors/>

## ***Minimizing Your Risk***

### PARTICIPATE IN YOUR CARE

- **Learn** about your medical condition and the treatments from reputable sources.
- **When you have questions, ask;** prepare a written list and copies.
- **Communicate honestly** about your medical history, symptoms, and relevant life style practices.
- **Bring** a trusted friend or loved one to your medical consults
- Be **polite**, but persistent – anyone can make mistakes

## PRESCRIPTION CHECKLIST:

- **Prepare** a written list of all prescription drugs, over the counter medications, and supplements; *give a copy for your doctor and the pharmacist.*
- **Ask** your doctor to review your medications at least twice a year.
- **Prepare** a list of allergies and secondary conditions; *give a copy to your doctor and pharmacist.*
- **Make sure** you can read the prescription and the dose.
- **Ask** why a medication, test, procedure, or surgery is being prescribed.

**Ask** your doctor, nurse, & pharmacist:

- What is the name of medication?
- What is it for?
- What are the most common side effects?
- What should be done if side effects occur?
- Is this medication safe to take with the other medications and supplements I take? (Provide list)
- What foods, drink, or activities should be avoided when I take this medication?

## OFFICE, HOSPITAL & SURGERY CHECKLIST

- Start with an **accurate diagnosis** – medication for the wrong illness can be dangerous.
- **Identify** the person in charge of overseeing your care.
- **Obtain** a written list of your medications and doses ...
- ... then **ask** for the name of the medication, the dose, and the person it's intended for, *before accepting it – including IV medications.*
- **Make sure** that all persons treating you know your medical condition, history, and identity.
- **Make sure that** the procedure or surgery you are receiving is intended for you.
- **Make sure** all persons who contact you, or items you use, have washed their hands – even if they wear gloves
- **Get a second opinion** for medical procedures, particularly high-risk treatments or surgery.
- Before surgery, **ask:** What precautions will be taken to ensure right-site surgery?

Adapted from Minimizing Medical Errors  
<http://www.strategicvisionsinc.com/docs/MedErrGui.pdf>

# PATIENTS AGAINST LYMPHOMA

## KEEPING YOUR FAMILY SAFE FROM MEDICAL ERRORS

FACT: At least 1.5 million Americans are sickened, injured or killed each year by errors in prescribing, dispensing and taking medications, the influential Institute of Medicine concluded in a major report.

### Lymphomation

~ Education ~ Support ~ Advocacy ~

3774 Buckwampum Road  
Riegelsville, PA 18077

Lymphomation.org 

[About Lymphoma](#) | [Advocacy & Art](#) | [CAM](#) | [Clinical trials](#)  
[Doctors](#) | [Guidelines at diagnosis](#) | [How to Help](#) | [Research](#)  
[Side Effects](#) | [Support](#) | [Symptoms](#) | [Tests](#) | [Treatments](#) | [WebCasts](#)

*“We have to view elderly patients (and those unable to remember or make wise judgment decisions) as children. We have to protect them. I believe that physicians and their staff should be held accountable - just as they would in handling children. They should make sure that a RESPONSIBLE adult is put in charge of medicating their patient.” – Jama Beasley*