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
- Wrong drug or dose given
- Missed dose
- Drug given for longer or shorter durations than intended

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 the 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?

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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

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 ~

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