

It's Your Healthcare: Be Involved!

Medical errors are among our country's leading causes of injury and death. Medical errors can occur anywhere in the healthcare system, and most of them result from a breakdown in communication between healthcare providers and patients. To that end, the New Jersey Hospital Association has prepared this informational brochure to help you become a more active participant in your own healthcare, taking part in every decision. The tips below were compiled from a variety of sources, including the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the Institute for Safe Medication Practices.



MANAGE YOUR MEDICINES

- Make sure that all of your doctors know about *everything* you are taking. This includes prescriptions, over-the-counter medications and dietary or nutritional supplements such as vitamins and herbs. It's a good idea to put everything into a brown bag once a year and take it with you to an appointment for your doctor to review them. This is especially important if you are receiving care from several physicians who may not know what the other physicians are prescribing for you. Keep a list of the medicines you are taking and the phone numbers of your physician(s) in your wallet so a quick reference is readily available at all times.
 - Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies and adverse reactions you have had to medicines.
 - Don't stop taking medicines or change dosages because of side effects without first consulting with your physician.
 - When your doctor writes a prescription for you, ask that the purpose for the medication be included on the form, and make sure you can read the prescription. If you can't read it, your pharmacist might not be able to read it either.
- Ask your physician and your pharmacist to include both the generic as well as the trade name for the drug on the prescription bottle, and that no abbreviations be used in the directions for taking.
 - Ask for information about your medicines in terms you can understand. It's OK to be curious!
 - ◆ What is the medicine for?
 - ◆ How will I know it is working?
 - ◆ How am I supposed to take it?
 - ◆ What are the side effects I should be aware of, and what do I do if I believe I am having any? Insist on getting this information in writing so that you can refer to it later if you have any problems.
 - ◆ Do I take this before or after meals, with or without food? Are there any foods or activities I should avoid while taking this medicine?
 - ◆ Is there a certain time when it is best to take this medicine?
 - ◆ What happens if I forget to take it?
 - ◆ How should I store this medicine?

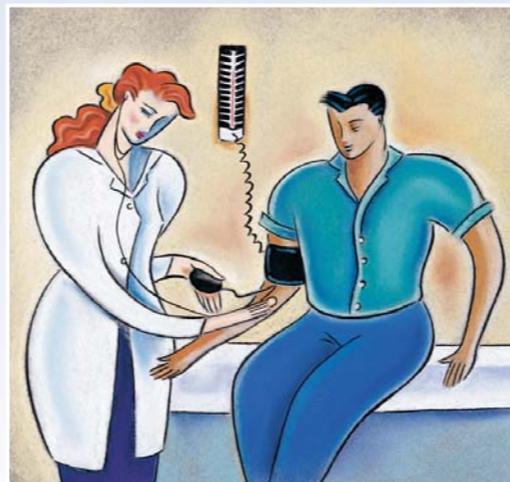
It's a good idea to always use a single pharmacy for filling your prescriptions so that the pharmacist can double check for potential drug interactions. If the prescription is for a small child, know his or her weight and let the pharmacist know.

When you pick up the medicine from the pharmacist, read the labels and make sure it is the right medicine for you and that you understand the instructions. If you are unsure of anything, have the pharmacist call your physician and verify the medicine and why you are taking it. Many medical errors are caused by the wrong medicine or the wrong dose.

AT THE HOSPITAL

If you get a choice of hospitals, do some research and choose one that has had a lot of experience treating patients with the same problem as yours. It is always a good idea when you are first entering the hospital to have a family member or friend with you who can act as a second pair of eyes and ears and as your advocate. Hospitalization and illness or pain can cause a lot of stress, and most people do not remember things as well.

- Take all your medicines (prescription and over the counter) and dietary and nutritional supplements with you so that the doctors and nurses know what you have been taking.
- Check your armband to ensure the accuracy of



your name, your doctor's name and your birthdate.

- If you are allergic to any medicines or foods, make sure you are given an armband that specifies these allergies. If you are allergic to some soaps or laundry detergents, let the staff know. If you have any history of allergy to latex, insist on a latex-free room.
- If English is not your primary language, or you are deaf, ask how the hospital will provide translation services for you and how you can access those services. In some instances it may be helpful to have a family member or friend with you at all times to translate.
- Make sure staff members wash their hands when coming into the room, give you any medications or treatment, and again as they are leaving your room. All staff should be wearing gloves when they are involved in activities where they may come into contact with "body secretions." For example, they will wear gloves when starting IVs, drawing blood, changing dressings, etc.
- If your doctor prescribes medicines for you to take while in the hospital, tell your doctor that you want to know the names of each medicine and the reasons you are taking them. Ask the same questions about side effects as you would if you were at home. When the nurses bring medicines for you to take (by mouth, by injection, or through an intravenous line), look at it, ask what it is for and insist that no medicine be given to you without the person checking your armband. If you are unsure of anything, speak up and ask that your physician be contacted.
- If you are having pain, tell someone. Make sure your physician and nurses know about it. Most hospitals use some form of a pain scale to rate pain and will ask you to score your pain before giving you any medication and then score it again 15 to 30 minutes afterward. If you don't

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MEDICATION CARD

Congratulations on taking this first big step toward an active role in your healthcare! Spend a few minutes completing this card, noting all medications (prescription, over the counter, herbal and nutritional) that you are currently taking. Keep this card in your wallet or purse at all times and review it with your physician(s) and pharmacist every time you see them. Make sure you update the card whenever there's a change.

NAME

YOUR PHYSICIAN(S) NAME(S)

PHYSICIAN(S) PHONE NUMBER(S)

YOUR DATE OF BIRTH

YOUR HEIGHT

YOUR WEIGHT

ALLERGIES

OTHER MEDICAL INFORMATION

