

KEEPING YOUR FAMILY SAFE FROM MEDICAL ERRORS

Checklists

Medical errors are a leading cause of injury and death in hospitals and other health care settings. Here we provide **Checklists** to help reduce risks and background on the **Common Causes of Medical Errors**.

Communications

Timely reporting of changes in symptoms is the cornerstone of good medical care. Only you can report how you feel!

Ask your doctor or nurse how you can best communicate changes.

Ask what types of symptoms should be reported immediately.

Let the doctor know when you or your loved one is not getting better or seem to be getting worse so that he or she can adjust the dose or change the medication if needed.

REPORT MEDICAL MISTAKES IN A NICE WAY

-- Be respectful of the people who are caring for you. Care centers can have hundreds of patients. Medical care is complex. Mistakes will happen. We are all human!

Prescriptions

Prepare for your doctor a concise list:

- Allergies you may have
- All prescription drugs you take
- Any over-the-counter (OTC) medications, and supplements you may take

Ask your doctor:

- To **review your medications** at least twice a year. Do you still need to take all of the drugs? Can any interact with another in a bad way? Do the doses need to be changed?
- To tell you the **name and purpose** of the medication and to write the drug name and dose clearly; and to include the purpose of the drug in the prescription.

Doctor / pharmacist questions:

- Do other drugs have similar names?
- What are the most common side effects?
- What side effects should you report immediately?
- Is this medication safe to take with the other medications and supplements I take?
- What foods, drink, or activities should be avoided when I take this medication?
- Is the dose correct? What should I do if I miss a dose, or double the dose by mistake?

Common Causes of Medical Errors

While medical providers are typically very well trained, skilled and caring, the system is complex and there are many "opportunities" for errors:

SYSTEM – HIGH CASE LOAD

- 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, diagnosis)
- 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 pharmacist¹
- 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
- Wrong drug or dose given ¹

¹ 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 (peer-reviewed, science-based) sources.
- **When you have** questions, ask! Prepare a written list of your questions.
- **Communicate honestly** about your medical history, symptoms, and relevant life style practices.
- **Have** a trusted friend or loved one take part in your medical consults.
- Be **polite** (anyone can make mistakes) but be persistent when you have questions.

OFFICE, HOSPITAL & SURGERY CHECKLIST

- Is it the right **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.
- **Prepare** a concise overview of your **medical history**.
- **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

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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.

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"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