NATIONAL PATIENT SAFETY FOUNDATION® (NPSF)

What You Can Do to Make Healthcare Safer:

A Consumer Fact Sheet

If a medical error occurs, it is often a result of a series of small failures that are individually not big enough to cause an accident, but combined can result in an error. Patients can ensure a safer experience with the health care system by being involved and informed about their treatment. Improving patient safety requires continuous learning and constant communication between caregivers, organizations, and patients. Everyone has a role in patient safety, and everyone will benefit from its successes.

What can consumers do to make sure they have a safer experience with the health care system? NPSF suggests these steps to help make your health care experience safer:

Become a more informed health care consumer:

- Seek information about illnesses or conditions that affect you.
- Research options and possible treatment plans.
- Choose a doctor, clinic, pharmacy, and hospital experienced in the type of care you require.
- Ask questions of your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or benefits plan coordinator.
- Seek more than one opinion.

Keep track of your history

- Write down your medical history including any medical conditions you have, illnesses, immunizations, allergies, hospitalizations, all medications and dietary supplements you're taking, and any reactions or sensitivities you've experienced.
- Write down the names and phone numbers of your doctors, clinics, and pharmacies for quick and easy reference.

Work with your doctor and other health care professionals as a team

- Share your health history with your care team.
- Share up-to-date information about your care with everyone who's treating you.
- Make sure you understand the care and treatment you'll be receiving. Ask questions if you're not clear on your care.
- Pay attention. If something doesn't seem right, call it to the attention of your doctor or health care professional.
- Discuss any concerns about your safety with your health care team.

Involve a family member or friend in your care

- If you're not able to observe or participate fully in your care, ask a family member or friend to assist. They can accompany you on appointments or stay with you, help you ask questions, understand care instructions and suggest your preferences.

Follow the treatment plan agreed upon by you and your doctor

- Be sure you receive all instructions verbally and in writing that you can read and understand. Ask questions about any instructions that are confusing or unclear.
- Take medications exactly as prescribed.
- Use home medical equipment and supplies only as instructed.
- Report anything unusual to your doctor.

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