



To prevent health care errors, patients are urged to...

Help Prevent Errors in Your Care

Behavioral Health Care



Service providers, you and your family—all have a role in keeping you safe. In all service settings, people are working to make safety a priority.

The “Speak Up” program is sponsored by The Joint Commission. They agree that individuals should be involved in their own behavioral health care. These efforts to increase consumer awareness and involvement are also supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

This program gives simple advice on how you can make behavioral health care a good experience. Individuals who take part in decisions about their own care are more likely to have a positive experience. To help prevent mistakes in your care, you are urged to “Speak Up.”

Speak up if you have questions or concerns. If you still don't understand, ask again.

- Your well being is important. Do not be embarrassed if you don't understand something that staff tells you.
- Don't be afraid to ask about safety.
- Don't be afraid to tell staff if you think you are about to get the wrong medicine.
- Let staff know about interventions that have worked for you in the past.
- Let staff know your goals and wishes.

Pay attention to the care you get. Make sure you get the right care by the right professionals. Don't assume anything.

- Tell staff or their supervisor if something doesn't seem right.
- Know what time of day you normally get medicine. If you don't get it tell your care staff.
- Make sure staff check your identity. Make sure they ask your name before giving you any medicine.

Educate yourself about your care. If a family member or friend needs care, find out about their care. Learn about the treatment or service plan.

- Ask staff about their qualifications.
- Look for information about your problem. If a family member or friend needs care, find out about their problem. Good places to get information are from people who have had similar experiences, care staff, the library, respected websites, support groups, and peer supports.
- Write down information that staff tells you. Ask staff if they have any written information you can keep.
- Read all forms. Make sure you understand them before you sign anything. If you don't understand, ask staff to explain them.

Ask a trusted family member, friend or peer to be your advocate (advisor or supporter).

- Your advocate can ask questions that you may not think about when you are stressed.
- Your advocate can help remember answers to questions you have asked. They can speak up for you when you cannot speak up for yourself.
- Read the consents for care with your advocate before you sign them. Make sure you both understand exactly what you are agreeing to.

- Your advocate should know what to look for if your needs change. They should also know who to call for help.
- Ask staff for a crisis telephone number in your community.

Know what medicines you take. Know why you take them. Medicine errors are the most common health care mistakes.

- Ask why you should take the medicine. Ask for written information about it. Find out its brand and generic names. Ask about the side effects of all medicines.
- If you do not recognize a medicine make sure that it is for you.
- When you get a new medicine tell your doctor about your allergies. Tell him or her about any bad reactions you have had to other medicines.
- If you take a lot of medicines ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to take them together. Do the same thing with vitamins, herbs and over-the-counter drugs.
- Make sure you can read the handwriting on prescriptions written by your doctor. If you can't read it, the pharmacist may not be able to either.

Use an organization that you have checked out before you get services. For example, The Joint Commission visits organizations to see if they meet The Joint Commission's quality standards.

- Ask if they have experience helping people like you. People with the same kind of problems.
- When it is time to leave, ask about follow-up care. Be sure you understand what your next steps are.
- Go to Quality Check at www.qualitycheck.org to find out if an organization is "accredited." Accredited means that the organization works by rules that make sure that safety and quality standards are followed.

Participate in all decisions about your care. You are the center of the care team.

- You and your staff should agree on the steps and time frame of your care.
- Know who will be taking care of you. Know the goals or outcomes of your care.
- Speak up about your personal goals.
- Talk with another clinician if you are unsure about the best care for you. The more information you have about the care available to you, the better you will feel about the decisions made.