Everyone has a role in making healthcare safe–physicians, nurses, healthcare executives, and technicians.

You, as the patient and a partner in clinical research, play a vital role in making the care you receive safe. You must be an active, informed, and vocal member of your healthcare team.

This brochure provides simple advice on how you, as the patient, can make your care a positive safer experience.

Clinical Center Communications

Speak up for Your Safety

Be an active partner in your care

Adapted from the publication, "To prevent healthcare errors, patients are urged to…Speak Up," by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations

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Speak up if you have questions or concerns about your care or the protocol in which you are enrolled. If you don't understand, ask again. You have a right to know!

• Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or the doctor if you think you are getting the wrong medication.

• Ask about safety. For instance, ask the doctor to mark the area that will be operated on so that there is no confusion.

• Don't hesitate to tell your healthcare professional if you think he or she has confused you with another patient.

Pay attention to the care you receive. Make sure you get the right treatments and medications by the right healthcare professional.

• Tell your nurse or doctor if something doesn't seem right to you.

• Make sure healthcare workers introduce themselves when they enter your room. Look at their identification badges.

• Know what time of day you normally receive a medication. If you don't get it at the usual time, tell your nurse or doctor.

• Make sure your doctor or your nurse checks your identification band— or asks your name and your date of birth—before giving you medications or treatments.

Educate yourself about your diagnosis, the research protocol in which you are enrolled, and all medical tests you are undergoing.

• Ask your doctor about the training and experience that qualifies him or her to treat you.

• Learn about your disease. Get information from your healthcare team, your library, respected websites, and support groups.

• Make sure you know about the operation of any equipment that is used in your care.

Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate.

• Your advocate can ask questions that you may not think about when you are under stress.

• Your advocate can also help remember answers to questions you have asked and can speak up for you if you cannot.

• Make sure this person understands your advance directives preference—for example, your decisions about resuscitation and life support.

• Review consents for treatment with your advocate before you sign them. Make sure both of you understand exactly what you are agreeing to.

• Make sure your advocate understands the type of care you will need when you go home.

Know the medications you take and understand why you take them.

• Ask about the purpose of your medications. Ask for written information about them.

• If you do not recognize a medication, make sure that it is for you before you swallow it.

• If you are given intravenous (I.V.) fluids, ask the nurse how long it should take for the liquid to "run out."

• Whenever you are to receive a new medication, tell your nurses and doctors about allergies you have.

• Make sure you can read the handwriting on all prescriptions. If you can't read it, the pharmacist may not be able to, either!

Understand all informed consent documents or other medical forms you are asked to sign.

Participate in all decisions about your care and treatment. You are the center of the healthcare team!

• You and your doctors should agree on exactly what will be done during each step of your care.

• Know that you can stop participation in your research protocol at any time

• Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion.

• Ask to speak to other patients who are on your protocol or who have had the procedure you are undergoing.