



# What Should Patients Do to Help Make Care Safe?

The responsibility for safe care lies primarily with the leaders of health care organizations and the clinicians and staff who deliver care, but patients and families can also play a role in preventing medical errors and reducing harm. Although barriers to patient engagement exist, being an active partner in your health care team is well worth the effort.

Among the things patients can do to help stay safe during medical care are the following:

- 1. Ask questions about the risks and benefits of the recommendations made by your health care provider.** It is essential that they understand your goals, values, and beliefs, and that their recommendations reflect those.
- 2. Don't go alone to the hospital or to doctor visits: Bring a sibling, spouse, friend, or neighbor— anyone you trust to be your ally.** They can speak up, help you remember, and provide emotional support.
- 3. Always know why and how you take your medications, and their names.** The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality suggests asking the following questions about medications:
  - What is the medicine for?
  - How am I supposed to take it and for how long?
  - What side effects are likely? What do I do if they occur?
  - Is this medicine safe to take with other medicines or dietary supplements I am taking?
  - What food, drink, or activities should I avoid while taking this medicine?
- 4. Understand the plan of action for your care: medical information and terminology is complex, so if you don't understand something, don't hesitate to ask.** Use the Ask Me 3™ questions if you don't know what to ask:
  - What is my main problem?
  - What do I need to do?
  - Why is it important for me to do this?
- 5. Say back to clinicians in your own words what you think they have told you.** By practicing this step on a regular basis, it may help you remember the instructions after you leave and helps clinicians know if you've understood.
- 6. Arrange to get any recommended lab tests done before a visit.** This way you can discuss the results during the visit.
- 7. Determine who is in charge of your care. In large organizations, you may see many health professionals.** Be sure you know who is ultimately responsible for your case.