

Five Steps to Safer Health Care

1

Ask Questions:

Ask lots of questions, especially if you have doubts or concerns. Make sure you understand the answers you are given. If you don't understand, find another health care provider that can explain it more clearly. When possible, write your questions down and bring a family member or friend with you to help you understand the information you are given. Interpreter services are also available if you need help in another language.

2

Keep a written record of all the medications you are taking:

Give your doctor and pharmacist a list of all medications that you are taking, including all non-prescription medications including vitamins and herbal remedies. Tell your health care provider about any allergies that you have, and the type of reaction you get. Remember to update this list whenever you have a change in your medications.

3

Get the results of tests and procedures:

Ask your doctor when you will get the results of tests and procedures. Ask if you will get them by phone, by mail or in person. Ask for copies of lab results. Don't assume that the results are fine if you do not get them when expected. Call your doctor and ask for your results. Ask your doctor what the results mean for your care.

4

Talk to your doctor about which hospital is best for your health needs:

Sometimes you may not be able to pick where health care services can be provided. Ask your doctor if there are other places you can receive treatment, such as closer to your home. Your community hospital may be able to meet your needs, so you may not have to travel.

5

Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery:

Make sure you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during the operation. Get answers to the following questions: "Who will manage my care when I am in hospital?" "Exactly what will you be doing?" "What are the risks and benefits to this surgery?" "What can I expect after the surgery?" Be sure to tell your health care team about any allergies you have and the kind of reaction you get. Remember to give them your updated list of medications.

