

Improving Your Medical Experience

By, Susan Locke, M.D.

You have control over your healthcare experience. Medical errors can result from poor communication between you and your physician. The more informed and involved you are as a patient, the better your medical experience will be. Here are 20 tips to improve your experience and avoid problems.



1. The single most important way to help prevent errors is to be an active member of your healthcare team. Take part in every decision about your health matters.
2. Inform your doctors of every medication you are taking. This includes prescription, over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements, such as vitamins and herbs. Consider bringing your medications with you.
3. Keep a list allergies or adverse reactions you have had to medicine, supplements or even medical equipment and share with your healthcare team.
4. Make sure that when your doctor writes you a prescription, you can read it. If you can't read the handwriting, chances are your pharmacist might not be able to either.
5. Ask for information about your medication in terms you can understand – at the time it is prescribed, as well as when you receive it.
 - What is this medicine for?
 - How am I supposed to take it and for how long?
 - Are there any side effects? What should I do if they occur?
6. Double-check your prescription when you pick it up from the pharmacy to confirm it is the medicine that your doctor prescribed.
7. If you have any questions about the directions on the medicine labels, ask the pharmacist. For example, does four times a day mean every 6 hours around the clock or just during waking hours?
8. Ask your pharmacist for the best device to measure liquid medicine.
9. Ask for written information about side effects and make sure you read and understand them.
10. If you are in the hospital, make sure that all healthcare workers wash their hands before coming in contact with you.
11. If you are having a planned surgery, choose a hospital and a doctor with significant experience with this procedure.

12. If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your doctor and your surgeon all agree and are clear on exactly what will be done.
13. When you are being discharged from a hospital, make sure you understand the discharge plan. This includes knowing your medications and finding out when you can go back to your regular activities.
14. Speak up if you have questions or concerns.
15. Have a “quarterback.” Make sure that someone, such as your personal doctor, is in charge of your care.
16. Make sure that all health professionals involved in your care have all of the important health information about you.
17. Have an advocate – ask a family member or friend to be there with you and who can speak up for you if you can’t.
18. Know that “more testing” is not always better.
19. If you have a test, do not assume that “no news is good news.”
20. Educate yourself – learn about your condition and treatments, not only from your doctor, but from other reliable sources.

The Healthnetwork team stands ready to answer your questions, arm you with information, and help you identify the most appropriate hospital and physician for all your medical needs.

(Adapted from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)



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Have a health question you want to ask Dr. Locke? Send an email to help@healthnetworkfoundation.org.
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