

# Tips for Patients and Families

## *Ask. Talk. Listen.*

Be involved in your health care and safety.



The Canadian healthcare system depends on human expertise, interaction and knowledge to care for patients. This human element is able to provide individualized treatment, intuitive diagnoses and compassionate care. However, even with the best of intentions, mistakes or unintended consequences can happen. When it comes to health, these mistakes can range from minor inconveniences to dire results.

Everyone involved in the healthcare equation has an important role to play in patient safety. Patients, families, nurses, physicians, pharmacists, lab technicians and many others are all pieces of the patient safety puzzle. Communication - asking, talking and listening - is essential to ensure all the pieces fit together.

As a patient or family member, studies have shown that people who are more informed and involved in their health care tend to stay safer and have better health outcomes. To ensure that you or your family member receive the best care possible, remember to ask - talk - listen with your team of healthcare providers.

### *Ask*

As a patient or family member, it is important that you understand as much as possible about the health care you receive. Ask questions until you feel comfortable with any treatment options, instructions or health advice.

- Write questions down in advance of your appointment and take notes when meeting with health care providers.
- Ask your doctor or health care provider to explain your condition in simple words if you are not clear about your problem or diagnosis.
- Ask what you can or need to do to alleviate symptoms or make your condition better.
- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist questions about your medications, such as why you are taking the medication, what the side effects are, how the medication will help you, and how and when you should take your medication.
- If you are required to get a test or treatment ask for the details, such as: Why do I need this test? What will it involve? What if I do not have this treatment? Are there alternatives?
- If you've been hospitalized, ask for medication changes, discharge date and instructions to be sent to your family doctor.



*The Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI) was established in 2003 as an independent not-for-profit corporation, operating collaboratively with health professionals and organizations, regulatory bodies, and governments to build and advance a safer healthcare system for Canadians. CPSI performs a coordinating and leadership role across health sectors and systems, promotes leading practices and raises awareness about patient safety by working in collaboration with partners, patients, their families and the general public. For more information on patient safety and what is happening in your community please visit our website at [www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca](http://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca).*



## Talk

You are best able to tell your doctor or health care provider about any problems you are having. There is important information you should tell your doctor that may help them provide a better diagnosis or avoid any unintended results or interactions.

- Tell your doctor or health care provider about previous treatments or surgeries, current prescriptions or any other health concerns.
- Keep a list or journal of your symptoms, your questions and write down answers.
- Bring an up to date list of all your medications, including herbal supplements and vitamins, or bring them with you to your appointment.
- Let your doctor know if you are under the care or treatment of any other doctors or healthcare professionals, such as a naturopath or herbalist.
- Inform the doctor of any chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes or allergies.
- Let your doctor know if you've had any adverse reactions or allergies to previous medications.
- Inform the doctor of any family health conditions.
- Talk to your pharmacist to ensure the medication dispensed is the one prescribed for your condition.
- Talk to your health care provider at the first sign of any discomfort or something that doesn't feel 'quite right'.



## Listen

When talking to your doctor or health care professional, listen to what he or she is saying. If you do not understand, tell them you do not fully understand or ask further questions for clarification.

- Keep a medical journal that keeps the details about your treatment and care. Include information such as medications prescribed, tests you receive and other important information provided by your health care team. If you're unable to do this, ask a friend or family member to do this for you.
- Bring someone with you to do the listening for you. If possible, ask that they write important information down for you in a journal. Often, our family members or other care providers may ask important questions that can assist in future decisions about your care.