

# healthsmart!

## Patient Safety: Staying Safe in the Hospital

Doctors and hospital staff work very hard to ensure that every patient has a safe and positive hospital stay. There is some risk involved in almost everything we do in life, though, including coming into a hospital. Falls, allergic reactions and infections can occur despite everyone's best efforts. Doctors, nurses and other hospital staff welcome the help of patients and their families, so that together patient safety is increased and the risks of unfortunate occurrences are lowered. Research shows that patients actively involved in their own care and who communicate with their health care team have a safer, more satisfactory experience.

Here are some ways you can be involved to make your hospital stay as safe as possible:

### Communication

**Communication is the most important aid to patient safety.** By talking regularly with the people taking care of you, you may be able to clear up misunderstandings before they create problems. For example, by reminding your doctors and nurses of your allergies, you can help ensure that you do not receive inappropriate medications. Feel free to ask questions whenever

you are not clear about something or if you are not sure why something is being done.

- Know who is in charge of your care and the name of the lead physician responsible for your hospital stay. At UK Chandler Hospital, this information is often written on a white board across from the bed.
- If you have any questions or concerns, talk with your nurse or your lead physician. Write your questions down so you won't forget them. If you still have concerns, call the hospital's customer service, patient relations or ombudsman program.
- Health care workers should always introduce themselves and explain their role before they perform their duties. Everyone who cares for you should wear a hospital/medical center identification badge. If they don't introduce themselves or if you are not sure who they are, ask.
- You have the right to be well-informed, well-cared for and safe. You also have the right to ask for a second opinion or even transfer to another hospital if you do not feel safe.
- Ask for an interpreter if you are deaf or hearing impaired, if English is not your primary language, or if you need help being understood for any reason.

- When you go home, make sure you are clear about discharge instructions, including medications and the need for follow-up visits. Be sure you are given a phone number to call if you have questions.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions or ask for clarification. A confident caregiver will appreciate and understand your need to know.

## Minimizing infections

GermS exist at home, at work and in hospitals. Hospital physicians and staff work hard to prevent you from getting an infection while you are in the hospital. **Handwashing by doctors, nurses, family and visitors is the most important way to minimize infections.**

- Ask friends or relatives who have colds, coughs, respiratory symptoms or contagious illnesses not to visit you or anyone in the hospital. Minimize visits from children under 12, as they frequently have colds or other infections that are easy to pass on.
- Flu or pneumonia vaccines can help prevent illnesses in elderly or high-risk patients. Please get a vaccination if it is recommended by your doctor.
- Let your nurse know if gowns and linens are soiled.
- Some patients are on "isolation precautions." Isolation can be for two reasons: to protect the patient who is in a weakened state from infection, or to protect others from something infectious the patient might be carrying. If you are on "isolation," understand what that means and what you should expect from the hospital staff or visitors and what is expected of you. Gloves, gowns and masks are sometimes the best protection.

## Reducing medication errors

Many hospitals now use a computerized medication ordering system to better manage medications and to significantly reduce medication errors.

### To help reduce the potential for problems:

- Ask your doctor or nurse about any new medications—what they are, what they do, when they are given and their side effects. Become familiar with their names and dosages. Let your nurse know if they are overdue or seem different.
- Tell your doctor and nurse if you have any allergies or have had previous reactions to drugs, food, latex, etc.
- Bring a list of all the medications you are taking. Do not bring the actual medications from home, unless directed by your doctor or hospital staff. Tell your doctor and nurse about all drugs you are taking (even vitamins, herbal remedies or over-the-counter medicine).
- Make sure the nurses and doctors check the wrist identification band provided by the hospital before giving you medicine.
- If you have an IV and the site is red or painful, tell your nurse. Tell the nurse if the IV doesn't seem to be dripping properly (if it is too fast or too slow or empty).

## Falls

**Don't ever be embarrassed to ask for help.** Most falls occur when patients try to get out of bed on their own, most often to go to the bathroom.

### To help prevent falls:

- Always ask for help from the nursing staff, especially at night.
- Keep your call button near you. Ask your nurse to show you how to use it.
- Keep the bed rails up. It is safer for you when you are in a strange place.
- Make sure there is adequate light to see, and keep your eyeglasses within reach.
- Wear slippers or footies with rubber soles to prevent slipping. Point out any spills or obstructions on the floor to anyone involved in your care.

- Make sure the brakes are locked when you get into or out of a wheelchair.
- Some medications can cause people to use the bathroom more often than they normally would. This can't be avoided and should never be a cause for embarrassment. If possible, call for help before the need to get up becomes urgent.

## Equipment/treatment errors

**Well-informed patients can help doctors, nurses and other hospital workers in avoiding mistakes.** Know as much as you can in advance about your treatment, medication, equipment and healing process.

- Find out what you should expect from any equipment being used on or around you. How is it supposed to sound or act, what is it supposed to do for you? Question anything that seems unusual or different from what you were told.
- Ask questions about any treatment you get. You may want to ask a family member or friend to listen with you when staff explains a diagnosis, treatment plan, test results or discharge plans. It is hard for one person to remember everything when you are given a lot of information in a short amount of time.
- Check the information on your hospital identification bracelet to make sure your name, date of birth and medical record number are on it. Two patients can have the same name, but no one else will have your medical record number. **Make sure all staff check your identification bracelet before any procedure, treatment, test or medication is provided.** You should have your identification bracelet on at all times. If it comes off, ask someone to get you another one.
- Write down questions you want to ask the staff about your procedure, treatment and medications

when the question comes into your head. If you don't write it down, you may not remember what you wanted to ask when lots of things are going on.

## Other tips

- Choose a teaching hospital where teams of doctors—specialists and hospitalists as well as newly licensed doctors (residents and fellows)—are always available to manage your care. You may have more faces and names to get used to, but you also have more people involved in your care. That means more people who can catch an error before it happens.
- Pay careful attention to where you put your dentures, hearing aids and glasses. They are important to your safety and they are the most commonly lost items in hospitals. Put them in a special container with your name on it, if possible.

## Continue safe health care practices at home

After you leave the hospital, continue your awareness of safe health care practices at home.

- Talk with your doctors and pharmacist. Ask questions, and write down what they say.
- You can get bed side rails at home if you need them.
- If you need other assistive devices, ask your doctor for a consult for occupational therapy.
- Keep a phone or a bell near your bed in case you need help.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Oxygen is highly flammable, so be very cautious if you have oxygen equipment in your home.
- If you have medical equipment that needs to be plugged in, use a grounded or three-prong connector. Don't use extension cords.

## Frequently requested information about UK Chandler Hospital

UK HealthCare Web site: [ukhealthcare.uky.edu](http://ukhealthcare.uky.edu)

The UK HealthCare Call Center:

**859-257-1000, 1-800-333-8874**

Volunteer Office: **859-323-6023**

Religious Ministries: **859-323-5301**

Social Work: **859-323-5501**

Customer Service: **859-257-2178**

Admitting and Registration: **859-323-5811**

## UK HealthCare resources

- Health Information Library: **859-323-7808**
- Consumers Gill Heart Line: **1-877-445-5478**
- PharmacistCARE (diabetes or cardiovascular disease): **859-323-4742**
- Chaplains Office: **859-323-5301**
- Customer Service: **859-257-2178**
- Interpreter Service: **859-323-8951**

### UK Health Information Library

- Hours: Monday-Friday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Computers, free Internet
- Hundreds of books, pamphlets

## Tips for a satisfactory hospital experience

- Learn the names of your nurses, physician and other key hospital workers.
- Keep a diary of what happens, who comes in, and what they say.
- Keep a list of questions for your doctors.
- Ask your nurses and doctors to give you information on your medical problem or procedure. Ask your family members to visit the hospital's library for information on your medical condition.
- If you smoke, ask to be given nicotine patches to reduce your desire to smoke.
- Never smoke in the hospital as oxygen is in use.
- Have your nurse show you how your bed works so you can make adjustments yourself.
- Leave valuables at home or ask to put them in a safe.
- Provide information on how to contact the family member or friend who is acting as your primary advocate.
- Ask for a chaplain. They are available to all faiths or to any patients who just want to talk .

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Call UK Health Connection at (859) 257-1000 or toll free (800) 333-8874 to make an appointment or request a referral. Visit us online at [www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu](http://www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu).

**UK**HealthCare