

FACT SHEET • JULY 2006

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO AVOID MEDICATION ERRORS

PERSONAL/HOME CARE

- Maintain a list of prescription drugs, nonprescription drugs and other products, such as vitamins and minerals, you are taking.
- Take this list with you whenever you visit a health care provider and have him or her review it.
- Be aware of where to find educational material related to your medication(s) in the local community and at reliable web sites.

PHARMACY

- Make sure the name of the drug (brand or generic) and the directions for use received at the pharmacy are the same as that written down by the prescriber.
- Know that you can review your list of medications with the pharmacist for additional safety.
- Know that you have the right to counseling by the pharmacist if you have any questions. You can ask the pharmacist to explain how to properly take the drug, the side effects of the drug, and what to do if you experience side effects (just as you did with your prescriber).
- Ask for written information about the medication.

AMBULATORY CARE/OUTPATIENT CLINIC

- Have the prescriber write down the name of the drug (brand and generic, if available), what it is for, its dosage, and how often to take it, or provide other written material with this information.
- Have the prescriber explain how to use the drug properly.
- Ask about the drug's side effects and what to do if you experience a side effect.

HOSPITAL INPATIENT CARE

- Ask the doctor or nurse what drugs you are being given at the hospital.
- Do not take a drug without being told the purpose for doing so.
- Exercise your right to have a surrogate present whenever you are receiving medication and are unable to monitor the medication-use process yourself.
- Prior to surgery, ask whether there are medications, especially prescription antibiotics, that you should take or any that you should stop taking preoperatively.
- Prior to discharge, ask for a list of the medications that you should be taking at home, have a provider review them with you, and be sure you understand how these medications should be taken.

Source: Committee on Identifying and Preventing Medication Errors, Institute of Medicine



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