



Bermuda Hospitals Board

S.P.E.A.K U.P

You are the most important member of your healthcare team!

Everyone has a role in making healthcare safe. That includes doctors, healthcare executives, nurses and many healthcare technicians. Healthcare organisations all over the world are working to make healthcare safe. As a patient, you can make your care safer by being an active, involved member of your healthcare team.

An Institute of Medicine report says that medical mistakes are a serious problem in the healthcare system. The Institute of Medicine says that public awareness of the problem is an important step in making things better.

Bermuda Hospitals Board (BHB) recognises that patients should be involved in their own healthcare. Our efforts to increase patient awareness and involvement are also supported by many other agencies.

BHB's Patient Safety Programme gives simple advice on how you can help make healthcare a good experience. Research shows that patients who take part in decisions about their own healthcare are more likely to get better faster. To help prevent healthcare mistakes, patients are urged to **SPEAK UP**.

Speak up if you have questions or concerns. If you still don't understand, ask again. It's your body and you have a right to know.

- Your health is very important. Do not worry about being embarrassed if you don't understand something your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional tells you.
- If you don't understand because you speak another language, ask for someone who speaks your language. You have the right to free help from someone who speaks your language.



If you have questions or concerns about patient safety at Bermuda Hospitals Board, please contact:

Patient Relations

(441) 239-1425

(441) 239-1553

feedback@bhb.bm

Patient Safety Hotline

(441) 291-SAFE (7233)

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- Don't be afraid to ask about safety. If you're having surgery, ask the doctor to mark the area that will be operated on.
- Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or doctor if you think you're about to get the wrong medicine.
- Don't be afraid to tell a healthcare professional if you think he or she has confused you with another patient.

Pay attention to the care you receive. Always make sure you're getting the right treatments and medicines from the right healthcare professionals. Don't assume anything.

- Tell your nurse or doctor if something doesn't seem right.
- Expect healthcare workers to introduce themselves. Look for their identification (ID) badges. A new mother should know the person she hands her baby to. If you don't know who someone is, ask for their ID.
- Notice whether your caregivers clean their hands. Hand hygiene is the most important way to prevent infections. Don't be afraid to ask a doctor or nurse if they have cleaned their hands.
- Know what time of day you normally get medicine. If you don't get it, tell your nurse or doctor.
- Make sure your nurse or doctor checks your ID. Make sure he or she checks your wristband and asks your name before giving you your medicine or treatment.

Educate yourself about your illness. Learn about the medical tests you get, and your treatment plan.

- Ask your doctor about the special training and experience that qualifies him or her to treat your illness.
- Look for information about your condition. Good places to get that information are from your doctor, your library, respected websites and support groups.
- Write down important facts your doctor tells you. Ask your doctor if he or she has written information you can keep.
- Read all medical forms and make sure you understand them before you sign anything. If you don't understand, ask your doctor or nurse to explain them.
- Make sure you know how to work any equipment that is being used for your care. If you use oxygen at home, do not smoke or let anyone smoke near you.



Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate (advisor or supporter).

- Ask this person to advocate for you during regular visiting hours or to be your official support person.
- Your advocate can ask questions you may not think of when you are stressed and help you remember the answers. He or she can speak up for you when you cannot speak up for yourself.
- Your advocate can help make sure you get the right medicines and treatments.
- Make sure your advocate understands the kind of care you want. Make sure he or she knows in advance what you want done about life support and other life-saving efforts in case you are unconscious and not likely to get better.
- Go over the consents for treatment with your advocate before you sign them. Make sure you both understand exactly what you are agreeing to.
- Make sure your advocate understands the type of care you will need when you get home. He or she should know what to look for if your condition is getting worse and who to call for help.

Know what medicines you take and why you take them. Medication errors are the most common healthcare mistakes.

- Ask why you should take the medication. Ask for written information about it, including its brand name and generic name. Ask about the side effects of all your medicines.
- If you do not recognise a medicine, double-check that it is for you. Ask about medicines you are to take by mouth before you swallow them. Read the contents on bags of intravenous (IV) fluids. If you're not well enough to do this, ask your advocate to do it.
- If you are given an IV, ask the nurse how long it should take for the liquid to run out. Tell the nurse if it doesn't seem to be dripping correctly (too fast or too slow).
- Whenever you get a new medicine, tell your doctors and nurses about any allergies you have or negative reactions you have had to other medicines.
- If you are taking more than one medication, make sure you ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to take those medicines together. Do the same thing with vitamins, herbs and over-the-counter drugs.
- Make sure you can read the handwriting on prescriptions written by your doctor. If you can't read it, the pharmacist may not be able to either. Ask somebody at the doctor's office to print the prescription, if necessary.



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- Carry an up-to-date list of medicines you are taking in your purse or wallet. Write down how much you take and when you take it. Go over the list with your doctor and other caregivers.

Use a hospital or healthcare facility that has been carefully checked out by a professional body. An accredited facility is one that works by rules to ensure patient safety and quality standards are measured and followed. For example, Accreditation Canada visits BHB's hospitals regularly to make sure we meet their hospital quality standards.

- Ask about the healthcare facility's experience in taking care of people with your type of illness. How often do they perform the procedure or test you need? What special care do they provide to help patients get well?
- If you have more than one hospital or facility to choose from, ask your doctor which one has the best care for your condition.
- Before you leave the hospital or other facility, ask about follow-up care and make sure you understand all of the instructions.
- If you plan to have treatment overseas, work with your health insurance case manager to choose an accredited facility within their provider network.

Participate in all decisions about your treatment. You are the centre of your healthcare team.

- You and your doctor should agree on exactly what will be done during each step of your care.
- Know who will be taking care of you. Know how long the treatment will last. Know how you should feel.
- Understand that more tests or medications may not always be better for you. Ask your doctor how a new test or medication will help.
- Keep copies of your medical records from previous hospital stays and share them with your healthcare team. This will give them better information about your health history.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you are unsure about the best treatment for your illness, talk with one or two additional doctors. The more information you have about all the kinds of treatment available to you, the better you will feel about the decisions made.
- Ask to talk to others who have had the same treatment or operation you may have to have. They can help you prepare for the days and weeks ahead. They may be able to tell you what to expect and what worked best for them.
- Talk to your doctor and loved ones about your wishes for life support and other life-saving efforts.