

NALC HEALTH BENEFIT PLAN PATIENT FACT SHEET



Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors

Medical mistakes continue to be a significant cause of preventable deaths within the United States. While death is the most tragic outcome, medical mistakes cause other problems such as permanent disabilities, extended hospital stays, longer recoveries, and even additional treatments. Medical mistakes and their consequences also add significantly to the overall cost of healthcare. Hospitals and healthcare providers are being held accountable for the quality of care and reduction in medical mistakes by their accrediting bodies. You can also improve the quality and safety of your own health care and that of your family members by learning more about and understanding your risks. Take these simple steps:

1. Ask questions if you have doubts or concerns.

- Ask questions and make sure you understand the answers.
- Choose a doctor with whom you feel comfortable talking.
- Take a relative or friend with you to help you take notes, ask questions, and understand answers.



2. Keep and bring a list of all the medicines you take.

- Bring the actual medications or give your doctor and pharmacist a list of all the medications and their dosage that you take, including non-prescription (over-the-counter) medications and nutritional supplements.
- Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any drug, food, and other allergies you have, such as latex.
- Ask about any risks or side effects of the medication and what to avoid while taking it. Be sure to write down what your doctor or pharmacist says.
- Make sure your medication is what the doctor ordered. Ask the pharmacist about your medication if it looks different than you expected.
- Read the label and patient package insert when you get your medication, including all warnings and instructions.
- Know how to use your medication. Especially note the times and conditions when your medication should and should not be taken.
- Contact your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.
- Understand both the generic and brand names of your medication. This helps ensure you do not receive double dosing from taking both a generic and a brand. It also helps prevent you from taking a medication to which you are allergic.

3. Get the results of any test or procedure.

- Ask when and how you will get the results of tests or procedures. Will it be in person, by phone, mail, through the Plan or Provider's portal?
- Don't assume the results are fine if you do not get them when expected. Call your healthcare provider and ask for your results.
- Ask what the results mean for your care.

4. Talk to your doctor about which hospital is best for your health needs.

- Ask your doctor about which hospital or clinic has the best care and results for your condition if you have more than one hospital or clinic to choose from to get the health care you need.
- Be sure you understand the instructions you get about follow-up care when you leave the hospital or clinic.

5. Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery.

- Make sure you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during the operation.
- Ask your doctor, "Who will manage my care when I am in the hospital?"
- Ask your surgeon:
 - "Exactly what will you be doing?"
 - "About how long will it take?"
 - "What will happen after surgery?"
 - "How can I expect to feel during recovery?"
- Tell the surgeon, anesthesiologist, and nurses about any allergies, bad reactions to anesthesia, and any medications or nutritional supplements you are taking.

Patient Safety Links

For more information on patient safety, please visit:

- www.jointcommission.org/speakup.aspx. The Joint Commission's Speak Up™ patient safety program.
- www.jointcommission.org/topics/patient_safety.aspx. The Joint Commission helps health care organizations to improve the quality and safety of the care they deliver.
- www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality makes available a wide-ranging list of topics not only to inform consumers about patient safety but to help choose quality health care providers and improve the quality of care you receive.
- www.npsf.org. The National Patient Safety Foundation has information on how to ensure safer health care for you and your family.
- www.bemedwise.org. The National Council on Patient Information and Education is dedicated to improving communication about the safe, appropriate use of medications.
- www.leapfroggroup.org. The Leapfrog Group is active in promoting safe practices in hospital care.
- www.ahqa.org. The American Health Quality Association represents organizations and health care professionals working to improve patient safety.

High Option members: Call our 24-hour nurse line at 877-220-6252 for medical health concerns or call 877-468-1016 for support for mental health and substance use concerns.

CDHP and Value Option members: Call our 24-hour nurse line at 855-511-5893 for medical concerns.