



Patient Safety

A Guide for Patients

“Everyone has a role in preventing medical errors... Physicians, healthcare execs, nurses, and other healthcare providers are already working hard to address ongoing problems... it is now time for the patients themselves to become part of this effort.”

-- Dennis O’Leary, M.D., President, Joint Commission on Accreditations of Healthcare Organizations, 2002

Introduction **Page 2**

**Arriving at
Hartford Hospital** **Page 3**

**During Your Stay at
Hartford Hospital** **Page 5**

**Being Discharged from
Hartford Hospital** **Page 10**

**When You Get Home from
Hartford Hospital** **Page 12**

Summary **Page 14**



Patient Safety: A Guide for Patients

Introduction

Welcome to Hartford Hospital! You can trust that your health care team will do everything to ensure you are comfortable and safe while we address your health care needs. If there is anything we can do, speak up! You have the right to considerate, respectful, and safe care.

We urge you, the patient, to take an active role in your care. Clear communication between you and your caregivers will ensure you have all the information you need to decide what is best for you to produce the best outcome. Be an active member of your health care team!

Let's Work Together!



Upon arriving at Hartford Hospital, you may have questions and concerns. There are several things you can do to help us address those needs and keep you safe.

■ **Provide Accurate Information**

Our hospital staff will ask you questions about your health history and current condition. Describe your condition in detail, giving accurate information so an appropriate diagnosis and plan of care can be developed. Tell your caregivers about all of your symptoms, how long they have lasted, and what you have already done to try to alleviate them.

It is extremely important to tell caregivers **every** prescription, over-the-counter medicine, herbal product, and dietary supplement you are taking. Make a list of current medicines you take, making sure to include the name, dose, how often you take the medication, and the last time you took it. This information will help caregivers prevent drug reactions. If you happen to have any medications with you, you should give them to the nurse if your family cannot take

them home. In addition, tell caregivers about any allergies that you have. Also make sure to mention if you are participating in a research study. This will help you to avoid taking a new medicine that might cause problems.

■ **Ask for Help from Family and Friends**

Alerting your family and friends to your condition can allow them to become an advocate for you if you are unable to provide your own information or speak up for yourself. They may also be able to alert medical staff to changes in your condition. Ask for help when you need it!

We encourage you and your family to take part in discussions about your care with your doctor and other caregivers.

During Your Stay at



While you are in the hospital, pay attention to the health care you receive. **Speak up if you have questions or concerns!** Be sure that you discuss any concerns about your comfort, health, and safety with your nurses and other caregivers.

■ **Take an Active Role in Your Care**

Be an active decision maker about your care. Let caregivers know about your concerns and goals so that everyone can work to meet your needs. Some medical terms can be hard to understand, so ask for terms to be explained. Also, ask questions before and after treatments you have received and the care you have been given to make sure you stay informed.

■ **Check Your Name Bracelet**

Check your name bracelet to be sure all information is accurate and readable. If something is incorrect or cannot be read, please inform your nurse. Make sure your caregivers

check your identification bracelet and verify you are the correct patient prior to giving you medications, drawing blood, or giving you any other treatment.

■ **Become Familiar with Your Caregivers**

Expect your caregivers to introduce themselves to you and their role in your care. Become familiar with your caregivers so they can address your unique health care needs. The more comfortable you feel with your caregivers, the better you'll be able to communicate your needs and allow us to address them.

■ **Ask for Reference Materials**

Ask if there are videos you can watch to understand your diagnosis, treatment, and maintaining your health. In addition, there may be printed materials you can take home for future reference about your care. You may also ask the staff at Hartford Hospital Health Sciences Libraries for more information.

■ **Know About Medication Safety**

Remember to let caregivers know **ALL** of the medications you are taking, including vitamins, over the counter drugs (such as, aspirin, antacids, pain relievers, etc.), or even herbs

and “natural” products. These can all have unwanted effects when combined with medications or anesthesia.

Familiarize yourself with the name, color, and size of the medications you are taking in the hospital. If you do not recognize a medication given to you in the hospital, question the nurse to be certain it is the correct medication for you and you understand what it is for. Remember to make sure staff checks your identification bracelet prior to giving you medications.

Ask questions about the medications you are taking while in the hospital, so you know why you are on them, if there are any side effects you should be aware of, and if there are any foods/activities you should avoid while on the medication.

■ **Be an Aware Patient**

Keep your call button near you to alert staff if you need assistance. Also, keep your overhead light cord within easy reach. Make sure you report any possible dangers you see within the hospital, such as wet floors or faulty equipment.

If you need assistance moving, (such as getting to and from the bathroom), ask for help from the staff. This can help prevent falls and keep you safe.

■ **Report Any Changes to Your Doctor or Nurse**

Your doctor and/or nurse need to know about any changes in your condition or new symptoms to help make an accurate diagnosis and assist in managing any problems. If you feel that something has changed in your condition, alert your caregivers. **Speak up!**

■ **Help to Minimize the Spread of Infection**

Ask everyone who comes in contact with you to wash his or her hands to prevent the spread of infection. Caregivers may use the hand sanitizer dispensers located near every patient room or use a sink with soap and running water. Also, ask your family and friends to refrain from visiting the hospital if they are sick.

■ **If You Require Surgery...**

Make sure you understand the procedure that will be done and feel comfortable with it. Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion before agreeing to the surgery. Also, ask your doctor if there are any alternatives to surgery, what are the benefits and risks, and what your outcome might be if you don't have the surgery.

When you completely understand the procedure and agree to it, ask your doctor who will be in charge of taking care of you after surgery and how your pain will be controlled. Inquire about how long you may take to recover and what restrictions on activities you will have to take.

When the anesthesiologist visits you prior to the surgery, tell him or her if you have any allergies, including an allergy to latex. Don't assume that he or she knows because you told other caregivers. If you or a family member has ever experienced a bad reaction to an anesthetic, please inform the anesthesiologist of that as well.

On the day of your surgery, you will be asked to confirm with the Operating Room staff the procedure you are about to undergo, the correct location, and side, if applicable. The correct location will be marked with "Yes." For example, if you are having your left foot operated on, you will be asked to identify which foot will be operated on and then your left foot will be marked "Yes."

Being Discharged from



When it is time to leave the hospital, it is important that you understand your discharge plan to ensure your continued safety and comfort.

■ **Make Sure You Understand Your Discharge Instructions**

Ask your doctor to clearly explain your plan of treatment after you return home. You should receive your instructions in writing from your nurse, but if you don't, ask for them to be written out for you. Be sure that your instructions include information regarding medications you are to take and when you may resume normal activities. It is also important to make sure you know if there are any diet restrictions that you should follow. Ask if you will need a follow-up visit with your hospital physician or your primary care physician, and when you should schedule an appointment.

■ **Ask Questions About Your Discharge Medications**

When you receive a prescription from your doctor, be sure you can read it - if you can't read it, your pharmacist may not be able to either. Be sure that you know the proper dosage and how and when to take the medication. For example, some medications should not be taken with food; others should be taken with food. Also ask about the timing of when to take your medications. If the instructions state to take the medication three times a day, find out if that means every eight hours, or three times during waking hours. Also, ask about possible side effects the medication may have.

■ **Become Familiar with any Medical Equipment You May Need**

If you have to use medical equipment at home, make sure you have received proper instruction from your caregivers. Before you leave the hospital, we will teach you how to care for yourself, and what people and places in the community can help you and your family.

When You Get Home from



Upon returning home from the hospital, remember there are several things you can do to keep yourself safe and also help the hospital to improve quality for others.

■ **Keep Yourself Safe at Home**

Remove all hazards that could cause you to suffer a fall at home. Remove slippery rugs and make sure hallways and stairwells are well lit. Don't hesitate to install hand railings near the shower or toilet, and make sure to use a non-skid shower mat.

If you are using oxygen at home, keep it away from flames, sparks, and heat sources. Oxygen is a fuel for fire, so **never** smoke around sources of oxygen. Keep oxygen tubing straight and clear from obstructions so the proper amount of oxygen will be administered.

Also, check all of your medications at home to make sure none are outdated and you are not taking one that you did not disclose to your health care providers. If so, call your doctor to make sure all of your medications can be taken in combination.

If you have any further questions about your condition or discharge instructions, don't hesitate to contact your doctor.

■ **Respond to Surveys**

After you return home, you and your family members may receive confidential surveys asking you to share your feedback on your stay at Hartford Hospital. Please respond to these surveys and send your comments. Health care safety and satisfaction is everyone's goal, and by compiling data from surveys and reading patient comments, the Hospital can continue to work to improve patient safety, quality, and comfort.

Let's Work Together!

In Summary:

- **Speak up** when you have questions or concerns!
- Become educated about your condition and treatment options.
- Keep your family members and friends informed of your condition so they can help you.
- Provide accurate information to your caregivers.
- Tell your health care team **every** medication you are taking, including over the counter drugs, herbs and other "natural" remedies. Also report allergies and reactions to anesthetics.
- Make sure you are being properly identified before your caregivers draw blood, give you a medication, or give you another treatment by verifying the information on your identification bracelet.
- If you need surgery, make sure you know what to expect.
- When you are discharged from the hospital, ask your doctor to explain the treatment plan you are to follow at home.
- Make your home safe by removing hazards and installing devices to help you after you are discharged.
- Respond to surveys to provide important feedback.
- **Be an active member of your Health Care Team!**



Quality and Patient Safety
Hartford Hospital
80 Seymour Street
Hartford, CT 06102
(860) 545-1852

Please do not hesitate to call if you have questions or concerns
about your care at Hartford Hospital!