



HEALTH AWARENESS

Five Steps To Preventing Medication Errors

(NAPSA)—Medication errors occur every day, both in the health care setting and at home. Although no medicine is entirely risk-free, you can take precautions to ensure your safety.

In the hospital, medicines pass through a series of steps to prevent possible errors before reaching the patient. This helps protect the safety of patients during their hospital stay.

“Checks are in place at the point when medicine is prescribed, when the prescription order is documented, when the medication is dispensed, and when the prescribed medicine is administered to the patient,” says Diane Cousins, R.Ph., vice president of the Center for the Advancement of Patient Safety at the United States Pharmacopeia (USP). “The patient is also monitored to assess any response to the medication—all in an effort to ensure patient safety.”

In the home, consumers must make informed decisions on their own about the safe use of medicines. A free brochure, *Think It Through: A Guide to Managing the Benefits and Risks of Medicines*, is now available to help consumers safely use medications. This free brochure is available on the Web at: www.usp.org/thinkitthrough.

This brochure educates consumers on the five critical steps in making decisions about medications: Talk, Know, Read, Avoid, Monitor. These steps allow consumers to lower the risks and obtain the full benefit from medications.

- Talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or other health care professionals. Keep an up-to-date list of medicines and dietary supplements you use, and always ask questions about any concerns or thoughts you may have.

- Know your medicines—pre-



scription and over-the-counter. Be aware of when, how, and how long to use them, what to do if you miss a dose, and whether or not there are any side effects.

- Read the label and follow directions. Always double-check that you have the right medicine, particularly if you are refilling a prescription, and never combine medicines in the same bottle. Make sure you understand the directions; ask if you have questions or concerns.

- Avoid interactions. Before starting any new medicine or dietary supplement, ask if there are possible interactions with what you are currently using. Whenever possible, use the same pharmacy for all your medication needs.

- Monitor your medicines' effects—and the effects of other medications or supplements you use. Pay attention to how you are feeling and write down the changes so that you can remember to tell your doctor or pharmacist.

For a free copy of the *Think It Through* brochure by mail, contact the Federal Citizen Information Center (FCIC) by writing to FCIC, Department 73, Pueblo, CO 81009; by calling (888) 878-3256 and asking for Department 73; or visiting www.pueblo.gsa.gov/rc/usp.htm. For more information about USP, visit www.usp.org.