

Health Alert

Prevent Medical Errors: Control Your Own Health Care

(NAPSA)—The good news: There's been an unprecedented focus on patient safety in the past five years.

The bad news: Medical errors are the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S., responsible for as many as 98,000 deaths each year.

The better news: According to the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), while many errors result from the complexity of health care systems, patients can protect themselves by taking control of their health care.

Medication, surgical and diagnostic errors are among the most prevalent and can largely be prevented through efforts from government agencies, purchasers of group health care, physicians and health care providers to make the system safer. While waiting for these large-scale, national changes, however, you can play an active role in protecting yourself against medical errors by taking control of your own health care and getting involved with every decision.

"Don't assume everyone knows everything they need to about your health care," says Dr. Boyd Lyles, director of HeartHealth and Wellness Center in Dallas. "Research and practical experience show that patients who become more involved in their care get better results overall."

Here are some recommendations for getting involved with your own care to prevent errors:

- Ask for information about your conditions and medicines in terms you can understand. Medical information is often difficult to decipher and interpret. Make sure your provider explains your treatment plan in detail and do not leave until you understand everything you need to know about your



Experts say the information provided on a medical ID can help protect against potentially harmful medical errors.

medicines—both when they are being prescribed and when you pick them up from the pharmacy.

- Keep your health care team informed. Make sure your doctors know about everything you take, from prescription medicines to dietary supplements and over-the-counter medications. Additionally, be sure your doctor knows of any allergies to prevent getting a medicine that can harm you. Personalized medical ID bracelets and necklaces, available in a variety of fashionable styles, are essential to communicate this information. Rick Russell, founder of American Medical ID, says that in many emergencies, wearing a medical ID could make a world of difference in the quality of care you receive. "Having medical information front and center helps address many risks associated with treatment. Wearing a medical ID offers you and your loved ones peace of mind."

- Finally, exercise your right to question anyone involved with your care—from physicians to pharmacists to insurance companies.

More information about personalized medical IDs can be found at www.IdentifyYourself.com.