

## Speak Up: National Campaign Urges Patients To Join Safety Effort

(NAPSA)—Two of the nation's leading advocates of health care quality and safety have launched a national campaign to urge patients to take a role in preventing health care errors.

Dubbed "Speak Up," the groundbreaking program sponsored by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) encourages patients to become active, involved and informed participants on the health care team. The simple steps are based on research which shows that patients who take part in decisions about their health care are more likely to have better outcomes. Such efforts to increase consumer awareness and involvement are supported by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

According to a 1999 Institute of Medicine report, errors in health care may be killing up to 98,000 people annually. While some progress has been made in addressing this problem, there is ample evidence that errors are still killing or endangering patients.

"Everyone has a role to play in preventing health care errors," says Dennis S. O'Leary, M.D., president, JCAHO. "Physicians, health care executives, nurses and other health care workers are already working hard to address this ongoing problem. It is now time for patients themselves to become part of this effort."

"The more information people have about health care, the better they can make decisions about what is best for them. We applaud efforts like the 'Speak Up' cam-

To help prevent health care errors, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations urges patients to "Speak Up":

- Speak up if you have questions or concerns, and if you don't understand, ask again. It's your body and you have a right to know.
- Pay attention to the care you are receiving. Make sure you're getting the right treatments and medications by the right health care professionals. Don't assume anything.
- Educate yourself about your diagnosis, the medical tests you are undergoing and your treatment plan.
- Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate.
- Know what medications you take and why you take them. Medication errors are the most common health care errors.
- Use a hospital, clinic, surgery center or other type of health care organization that has undergone a rigorous on-site evaluation against established, state-of-the-art quality and safety standards, such as those provided by JCAHO.
- Participate in all decisions about your treatment. You are the center of the health care team.

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paign to get patients to ask questions and become informed about their health care services," says Tom Scully, administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The "Speak Up" campaign symbolizes the long-standing collaboration between the public and private sectors in promoting health care quality and patient safety.

JCAHO has been at the forefront of patient safety since it was established in 1951. Today, it accredits nearly 18,000 hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, home health agencies, outpatient clinics, surgery centers, behavioral health programs, laboratories and managed care organizations nationwide.

JCAHO also maintains one of

the country's most comprehensive voluntary databases on adverse events caused by medical errors. The database includes reported events and detailed information about their underlying causes and provides the basis for periodic Joint Commission alerts to health care organizations which offers practical advice on how to avoid specific kinds of errors.

Consumers can download a "Speak Up" brochure that provides specific guidance to patients to help them make their care safer by visiting the JCAHO Web site, [www.jcaho.org](http://www.jcaho.org). The brochure is also available by calling JCAHO's Customer Service Center at 630-792-5800, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday.