

Medications: Friend or Enemy?

Friend indeed. Medications have improved at a rapid pace over the past 50 years. Medications help us stay healthy and live longer . . . but, medication mistakes can also be our enemy.

One of the most common mistakes in health care is a medication error. That is when a patient takes too many, too few, or the wrong medication. Medication errors can be serious. Medication errors can cause serious complications or even death.

Medication errors happen anytime a patient doesn't take a prescribed medication the right way, the right dose, at the right time – and that may be inside or outside of a healthcare setting.

The good news is that patients and family members can help prevent medication errors.

Medication errors often happen at “transition points,” when patients enter the hospital, moves from one facility to another, or leaves the hospital. A national program to reduce medication errors at these transition points is occurring. It is called “Medication Reconciliation.” Medication Reconciliation simply means that a patient's home medications are reviewed and compared to what the physician has ordered at each transition point.

There are ways YOU can help with Medication Reconciliation. YOU can help prevent medication errors by knowing about the medications you take. This is easiest to do by keeping a list of all your medications.

At CMH, we will give you this list to the best of our knowledge at each visit in our clinics, in the emergency room and at discharge from the hospital. Here is the most important part . . .

- 1) Keep this medication list with you and 2) update it with any changes between visits.**

Between visits, mark out medications that you stop taking. Add medications that you start taking. Your medication list should include ALL medications you take, including herbals, vitamins, eye drops, patches, ointments, inhalers and over-the-counter medications like antacids, laxatives and analgesics. As you add to your CMH medication list, include the number of tablets, capsules, puffs, or drops you take at one time.

Bring your medication list each time you come to the hospital, emergency room, or clinic.

If you haven't been to CMH lately, create your own medication list and include (1) names of your medications, (2) dosages, (3) the times you take each medication, (4) the

way you take each medication, (5) why you take the medication and (6) any allergies and intolerances, along with the reaction you have.

IN THE HOSPITAL . . . you can help with medication safety. Know that you have an important role. If something doesn't feel right . . . if you're unsure about a medication, **speak up!** You have the right to ask questions. If you feel a medication is making you sick, causing you pain or other side effects, report it immediately.

Hospital staff should check your wristband and ask your name to confirm your identity before giving you medications. They will also scan your wristband and the medication to assure a match. When you are given a medication in the hospital, be sure you know what it is and why you need it.

WHEN YOU ARE DISCHARGED . . . we'll give you your medication list to take with you. Review it to make sure it makes sense to you. Make sure you understand how to take each medication on the list.

Medications: Friend or Enemy? You decide – take the right steps to make sure medications are your friend