

## **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. Your health is important to us.

- Don't be afraid to ask about safety.
- Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or the doctor if you think you are about to receive the wrong medication.
- Don't hesitate to ask your caregiver if you have questions about tests or procedures you have not previously heard about.

## **PAY ATTENTION** to the care you are receiving. Make sure you are getting the right treatments and medications by the right health care professionals. Don't assume anything.

- Tell your nurse or doctor if something doesn't seem quite right.
- Expect health care workers to introduce themselves when they enter your room. Look for their identification badges.
- Notice whether your caregivers have washed their hands. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent the spread of infections. Don't be afraid to gently remind your caregivers to do this.
- Know what time of day you normally receive medication. If you notice a difference, bring this to the attention of your nurse.
- Make sure your nurse or doctor confirms your identity – that is, checks your wristband or asks your name, before he or she administers any medication or treatment.

# Speak UP

## **EDUCATE** yourself about your diagnosis, the medical tests you are undergoing and your treatment plan.

- Ask your doctor about the specialized training and experience that qualifies him or her to treat your illness (and be sure to ask the same questions of those physicians to whom he or she refers you).
- Gather information about your condition. Good sources include your doctor, your hospital, your library, credible websites and support groups.
- Write down important facts your doctor tells you. Ask your doctor if he/she has any written information you can keep.
- Thoroughly read all medical forms and make sure you understand them before you sign anything. Ask for help if you don't understand.
- If you have questions about equipment being used in your care, ask your caregiver. Do not attempt to adjust equipment yourself.

## **ASK** a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate, that is someone you completely trust.

- Ask your nurse if you should ask this person to stay with you when you are hospitalized – even overnight – to assist you in resting more comfortably.
- Your advocate also can help remember answers to questions you have asked.
- Make sure this person understands your preferences for care and your wishes concerning resuscitation and life support. If this person is going to make decisions for you, make sure that you have signed the forms giving him/her the authority to do so. Your caregiver can assist you with this.
- You may want to review consents for treatment with your advocate before you sign them to make sure you both understand exactly to what you are agreeing.
- Make sure your advocate understands the type of care you will need when you get home. Your advocate should know if your condition is getting worse and whom to call with questions or for assistance.

## **KNOW** what medications you take and why you take them. Medication errors are the most common health care mistakes.

- Ask about the purpose of the medication, including its brand and generic names. If you wish, we can provide you with written information. Also inquire about the side effects of the medication.
- If you do not recognize a medication, verify that it is for you. Ask about oral medications before swallowing. Ask about the contents of bags of intravenous (IV) fluids.
- If you are given an IV, ask the nurse how long it should take for the fluid to "run out." Tell the nurse if it doesn't seem to be dripping properly (too fast or too slow).
- Whenever you are going to receive a new medication, tell your doctors and nurses about allergies you have or negative reactions you have had to medications in the past.
- If you are taking multiple medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to take those medications together. This holds true for vitamins, herbal supplements and over-the-counter drugs, too.
- Make sure you can read the handwriting on any prescriptions written by your doctor so that you can make sure your pharmacist gives you the right medication.

## **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 that provided by JCAHO.

- Ask about the health care organization's experience in treating your type of illness. How frequently does the facility perform the procedure you need and what specialized care do they provide in helping patients get well?
- Before you leave the hospital or other facility, ask about follow-up care and make sure that you understand all of the instructions.
- North Oaks is a fully accredited health care organization.

## **PARTICIPATE** in all decisions about your treatment. You are the center of your health care team.

- You and your doctor should agree on what should be done during each step of your care.
- Know who will be taking care of you, what to expect, and what your plan of care will be.
- Ask your doctor what a new test or medication is likely to achieve. Don't assume more tests or medications are better.
- Don't be afraid to seek a second opinion.
- Speak with others who have undergone the procedure you are considering. These individuals can help you prepare for the days and weeks ahead. They also can tell you what to expect and what worked best for them as they recovered.

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## **North Oaks**

*is committed to providing quality health care in a safe environment. We welcome and encourage your active participation as the most important member of your health care team.*

## **Help Prevent Errors.**