

Doctors, nurses and hospital staff use their best tools in treating patients during their stay, but patients and their families need to use their most important tool for staying safe. Good communication.

Hello, I'm Dr. Colleen Conway-Welch, dean of the Vanderbilt University School of Nursing.

Staying Safe in the Hospitals: Patient Essentials will teach you and your family the critical skills everyone who comes into a hospital needs to know. And if you, yourself don't feel comfortable, or capable of communicating about the essential aspects of your care, then we will show you how a patient advocate can help. From medication to procedures, to treatments, to operations, patients or their advocates need be active participants in their care.

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### **Narrator**

Safety has always been a priority in hospitals. But research shows that your involvement can immensely improve the safety of a hospital stay.

Physicians, clinicians and pharmacists all face a constant stream of new technologies and therapies; including drugs, devices and complex equipment that require they adapt to an ever-changing healthcare environment. That is why as a patient, it is extremely important to be as involved as possible, and understand everything that is happening to you, and every medication that is being given to you.

It's essential you build a good relationship with your health care team.

Doctor William Hendee is on the Board of Directors of the National Patient Safety Foundation.

### **William Hendee, PhD** **National Patient Safety Foundation**

“Health care is not something that you purchase as a commodity in a store. It is a partnership where you as the patient and you as a person have a real responsibility to help sustain your health and help make the quality of care that you receive the highest quality and the safest healthcare that you could possibly get.”

**Narrator**

Julian Soshnick knows that first hand. He’s a cancer survivor and has had many hospital stays. He has a good relationship with his health care team and that makes him feel more confident about the care he receives.

**Julian Soshnick**

**Patient**

“No hesitation whatsoever, in trusting them with my life.... I am right now.”

**Narrator**

Because he’s an experienced patient Julian understands the hospital staff is there to help him but, other less experienced patients might not understand that and put themselves in harms way.

**William Hendee, PhD**

**National Patient Safety Foundation**

“One of the most serious risks in hospitals is falls. Patients falling, because they try to get out of bed, they try to make it to the bathroom, they try to roll over, whatever it is they may try to do, without assistance because they don’t want to trouble the staff.”

**Narrator**

But if you’re foggy with medication, unstable on your feet, or unsure about where you are and you try to move without assistance, you can actually make the staff’s job more difficult.

**William Hendee, PhD**

**National Patient Safety Foundation**

“Well that’s what the staff is there for. The staff would much rather provide help than to see you risk your own health by trying to do something on your own. So in fact the rule is, ask for help, because that’s why those people are there.”

### **Narrator**

By paying attention to the instructions given by the healthcare providers and not trying to “over do it” on your own, you can help make your hospital stay more efficient and safe and possibly speed your recovery time. But, if you don’t fully understand the instructions given or don’t follow them correctly, that can lead to serious complications.

Hospital acquired infections are a problem. Some simple ways to protect yourself as a patient include: Insisting that everyone involved in your care, wash and/or sanitize their hands when entering the room and making sure visitors who might have colds, wash their hands once they enter the room. Better that you ask them to stay away until they’re feeling better.

Drawing blood can be another source of potential infection. Again, insist that staff wash hands and wear gloves, and you can reduce the risk.

Since many of the procedures that occur during a hospital stay penetrate the body’s natural defense barriers, you can be put at risk for serious illnesses. For example IV’s and urinary catheters may provide a path for bacterial invasions. If you experience pain, redness or swelling at an IV site alert someone on the hospital staff right away.

### **William Hendee, PhD** **National Patient Safety Foundation**

“Another example is don’t change your bandages as a patient. Bring in the healthcare provider to do that, that way you can control the likelihood of a new infection to a greater degree.”

### **Narrator**

Also, you should know exactly what medication is being given to you in your IV. You have an ID wristband that should always be checked before the IV is started and certainly before you’re given a blood transfusion, or you’re taken out of the hospital room for any procedure. And to prevent operations on the wrong body part, insist your surgeon sign the site of the operation before you leave the room.

Treatment during a hospital stay may include medications, often many medications and the possibility of confusion exists. We’ll show you how to limit that confusion, up next.

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**Narrator**

Before coming to the hospital you should make a list, a record, of all the medications you are currently taking. This can help your healthcare team prevent any inadvertent drug interactions. Kristen Hanson is a medication safety officer.

**Kristin Hanson**  
**Medication Safety Officer**

“So as a patient is admitted to the hospital there often is so many things going on and things are moving so quickly, and they may be flustered or nervous or really not able to give a very accurate medication history for whatever reason, if they have it written down or the family member has it written down to provide that its much more accurate to give to the physician.”

**Narrator**

Once you’re in the hospital, before you take any new medication, you should always ask the nurse what the medication is, it’s dose, how often you take it, for how long, and what its for. You should make sure that each dose of the same medication is the same size, shape and color. And if you’re not sure, don’t take the medication until the nurse has double-checked.

Sometimes it’s the staff that question medications. Julian’s nurse was worried about a particular dose and asked the attending physician before she administered it.

**Julian Soshnick**  
**Patient**

“Doctor said, no it was right, don’t worry about it, but for her to have that kind of concern about a patient and the knowledge to believe that theirs a possibility that this medication may have been inappropriately prescribed.”

**Narrator**

Julian’s healthcare team has earned his trust.

**Julian Soshnick**  
**Patient**

“I always had the feeling that the doctors and nurses were here to heal me and to help me both physically and psychology and if I had some anxiety and needed some questions answered I’d get them answered.”

**Narrator**

So, ask questions, especially about a medication that you don't completely understand, or a procedure you're unsure of.

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*So how are we doing? Very good, the advair is excellent.*

**Narrator**

Kathy has lived with a chronic respiratory condition for many years and has spent a lot of time in hospitals. Over the years she's learned how important it is to be able to ask questions and get answers.

**Kathleen Radin**

**Patient**

“And you can ask questions, and you have that ability and doctors don't feel insulted or hurt if you ask him a questions. If I say to them, I'm concerned about a procedure, I don't think I really want it, they'll talk to you about it with you and give you an option and they'll tell you the best thing in your case. I have had that wonderful experience.”

**Narrator**

All healthcare providers should be willing to explain in detail about any procedure and in Kathy's case her physician helped her feel more comfortable.

**Kathleen Radin**

**Patient**

“ I was terrified that I had to have a pulmonary scan on my lungs and I was terrified of being in this machine and thank god, there was a doctor there and he talked me through it and he helped me, it was a doctor an actual doctor that actually did it. Not sending in someone else, they talked me through it and helped me understand what I was going through, it was so much easier.”

**Narrator**

It's in your best interest, to understand completely the reasons for the medications and procedures being prescribed.

**John S. Toussaint, MD**  
**ThedaCare**

“We believe that the provider should be the guest in the patients life. And what that means is that we are really are acting as consulting partners to the patient or the customer.”

**Narrator**

Dr. Toussaint has been a physician for many years and is the CEO of ThedaCare a community owned healthcare organization in Wisconsin. He believes patients should be encouraged to ask questions of their healthcare providers and in fact should be prepared with a list prior to the doctor’s office visit.

**John S. Toussaint, MD**  
**ThedaCare**

“The patient should not feel in any way concerned about having a list of questions. I believe strongly that you need to get your questions answered. There’s no dumb question and that’s an important part of the process. The physician, nurse or whoever is acting as the consultant go through carefully, each one of those questions and make sure they are fully answered.”

**Narrator**

While its understandable that you may be reluctant to appear to be questioning the doctor’s decisions that’s not how physicians see it. Healthcare providers want you to know about your treatment. They believe an informed patient is an invaluable resource.

**Cathleen Harris**  
**Patient Advocate**

“It used to be that patients answered the questions, not asked the questions; today patients have to ask questions. They have to ask questions in order to get informed”.

**Narrator**

Cathleen Harris is on the Patient Advocacy board at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

**Cathleen Harris**  
**Patient Advocate**

“I think too often, patients feel that their doctor is busier, and smarter and more important that they are. And this thinking is wrong. I think that sets up a barrier to the patient, the patient no longer feels that they can take up a doctor’s time in asking questions”.

**Narrator**

During a hospital stay, the healthcare team wants you to be as comfortable as possible. As a partner in that healthcare, you should be expected to communicate clearly and frequently about your treatment and level of pain and discomfort. But, sometimes you may not be able to communicate effectively. What happens then? We'll show you, coming up next.

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**Narrator**

Sharon Bricker was brought into the emergency room in critical condition after she suffered a heart attack and collapsed lung. She attributes her bright outlook and speedy recovery to her healthcare team.

**Sharon Bricker**  
**Patient**

“Just the personal caring, you can tell they care themselves. At some hospitals I've been in, it's a job and to these people, it seems more of a concern, a real concern and I see that and it makes a difference and within two days I feel like 200% better and I think a lot of it is attitude here.”

**Narrator**

You can't always remain alert and attentive enough to determine much about the quality and safety of the care you are receiving. For this reason, many hospitals recommend, if possible, a patient advocate, accompany you to the hospital.

**William Hendee, PhD**  
**National Patient Safety Foundation**

“We really encourage people who come to a hospital to bring someone along who can serve as your advocate. That person can be a family member who is involved in your care, who's really speaking for you, watching over you in terms of how you are feeling, and how you're understanding things, and communicating with the nursing staff and with the physicians, and with the other members of the healthcare providing team on your behalf.”

**Narrator**

Your advocate may be a family member, friend, minister or in some cases, a patient advocate furnished by the hospital.

**Narrator**

For most of his life, Richard Eyer was a hospital chaplain in a non-sectarian hospital. He is retired now, but for more than twenty years he was an advocate to many patients and knows first hand what it takes.

**Richard Eyer**  
**Chaplain**

“The companion really should be someone who is pretty emotionally stable and is able to give the objectivity that maybe the patient doesn’t have because of what they’re going through.”

**Narrator**

Before you come in to the hospital, you need to make sure your advocate can make difficult decisions, if necessary. Sometimes choosing a family member as an advocate may not be best.

**Richard Eyer**  
**Chaplain**

“Well, sometimes a husband or wife may not be a good choice because they’re too close to the patient. They may be more emotionally upset than even the patient worried about them and therefore not able to see things as clearly as they may have to. It may also be that a companion you bring is a good friend isn’t really comfortable in a hospital setting.”

**Narrator**

If possible, your advocate should be involved during the admitting process and throughout your care. But, in an emergency like Sharon Bricker’s, you may not be able to speak and in those cases a chaplain can become your spokesperson.

**Richard Eyer**  
**Chaplain**

“This is where I was often called in as hospital chaplain, where if they knew this person was alone, needed support, needed a spokesman, someone to help them understand what was going on they would call for the chaplain.”

**Narrator**

Often, Richards biggest job was to listen to the patients.

**Richard Eyer**  
**Chaplain**

“I think listening is probably the key thing. You have to really be able to hear what people are saying. Its not so much what you say, as much as you show them that you understand what they’re saying and how they feel.”

**Narrator**

During all medical procedures that involve risks, an informed consent document is required before the procedure begins. You have the right to be fully informed, and understand what procedure is being performed, how it is going to be done and by whom? And if you have any concerns, you should speak up.

**Cathleen Harris**  
**Patient Advocate**

“The most important question a patient should ask when they are getting ready to sign a informed consent document or before agreeing, or really in the initial decision making process: what are the risks involved?”

**Narrator**

Cathleen’s experience as a patient advocate helped when she was treated for breast cancer. Before undergoing major surgery she had some special requests.

**Cathleen Harris**  
**Patient Advocate**

“And I requested and felt, that I needed to speak with each doctor that was going to be involved in that surgery and that included the anesthesiologist.

**Narrator**

Cathleen had the opportunity to get to know her physician well in advance, and develop their relationship. That made her surgery easier on her emotionally.

**Cathleen Harris**  
**Patient Advocate**

“When I was wheeled into the operating room I was fully confident that I was in good hands.”

**Narrator**

Patient safety experts want stories like Cathleen’s to be more common in the future.

**Lucian Leape, MD**  
**Harvard School of Public Health**

“Part of what has come out of that is a real belief that patients are not only entitled to know everything, but its in their interest and its in the interest of safety and better quality care for patients to really understand and know what’s going on.”

**Narrator**

Doctor Lucian Leape is an adjunct professor of health policy at the Harvard school of Public Health and one of the leaders in the Patient Safety movement. He says making healthcare “patient centered”, is a first step in the right direction.

**Lucian Leape, MD**  
**Harvard School of Public Health**

“The catch phrase is: Nothing about me without me. I like that. If you know it doc, I have a right to know it. And there’s no reputable physician I know who disagrees with that.”

**Narrator**

Up next, we’ll have a final checklist for you before you go into the hospital.

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**Narrator**

Once you are discharged you should know what your home healthcare routine should consist of.

**William Hendee, PhD**  
**National Patient Safety Foundation**

“So, when you leave the hospital make sure you have clear directions as to what you as a responsible patient are suppose to do once you get home, and do it. And get somebody else to help you follow directions, if you think you might get confused.”

**Narrator**

The healthcare community as a whole is developing patient safety programs to prevent injury or loss of life, and improve the lives of patients.

**William Hendee, PhD**  
**National Patient Safety Foundation**

“We need to design our health care delivery system so that when people make mistakes, those mistakes don’t end up jeopardizing the health and lives of patients. And that’s really where we have been focusing.”

**Narrator**

Julian doesn’t visit the hospital as often these days, but he knows that without being an informed patient, he may have not been able to enjoy his grandchildren today.

**Julian Soshnick**  
**Patient**

“There’s a bad joke, if I knew how good it was to be a grandfather, I’d skipped everything in the middle. Its true being a grandfather and grandmother, it’s just extraordinary.”

**Narrator**

Patient safety experts agree: the most important ingredient is effective communication between the patient and the physician, nurse or other healthcare providers.

**William Hendee, PhD**  
**National Patient Safety Foundation**

“Effective communication means you communicate what’s wrong as best you can and how you feel and you also make sure you understand what the diagnosis is and what the treatment is going to be.”

**Narrator**

So, remember these following steps before going to the hospital and once you’re there:

- Make sure you have a healthcare advocate.
- Make sure the healthcare advocate knows your wishes and needs.
- Be sure the advocate is comfortable about expressing your wishes and needs to the healthcare team.
- You and your advocate need to be not afraid to ask questions and ask them until understood.
- When healthcare personnel come into your room, be sure they wash their hands or use a liquid sanitizer and ask about it if you don’t see them do it.
- Do not change or adjust your bandages; ask for assistance.

- Be aware of potential medication or procedural errors, and understand the reasons for all medications and procedures. If something doesn't seem right, ask about it.
- Be sure someone has explained the risk of procedures such as anesthesia and surgery, and the patient is comfortable assuming the risk.
- Mark the surgical site before surgery.
- If you've been instructed not to get up from bed, don't – ask for help.
- If you are up and walking after surgery, don't overdo it; remember that you have to walk back from wherever you've walked to.
- When you're discharged from the hospital, be sure that you understand your medications, rehabilitation program and any other instructions, and ask that they be put in writing.
- Make sure you voice any concerns and questions that you have at any time.
- You have the right to insist you are listened to and understood.

With an increasing emphasis on patient safety, with you and your health care team working together, the hope is this will drastically reduce the number of errors and help save lives.

**William Hendee, PhD**  
**National Patient Safety Foundation**

“Our bottom line is to help people, and that's what healthcare is all about.”