

healthy habits



Empowering Consumers with Better Health Care

Issue 1

Why Be an Empowered Health Care Consumer?

The cost of employee health care premiums has increased more than four times faster than the average worker's earnings since the year 2001! ⁽¹⁾ Unfortunately, these higher costs don't always guarantee quality care.

Is there anything you can do? Is there a way to receive better care and lower your costs?

By becoming an empowered health care consumer, you will be informed and more involved in health care decisions. You will learn about health and medical practices and take an active role in treatment decisions, often resulting in better care at lower costs. This series of newsletters is being produced to help you achieve this goal: **Better Care, Lower Cost.**



More Involvement
+
More Information
=
Better Care

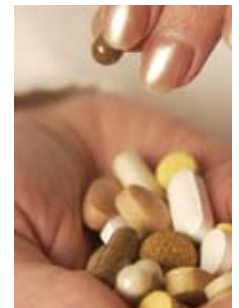
Medical practices

The reasons to become an empowered health care consumer are compelling. In our health care system today, the frequency of medical mistakes and excess treatments is alarmingly high. These mistakes and overtreatments are dangerous for your health and draining on your pocket book.

Here is what the experts tell us:

- Forty-five percent of the time, the health care received by adults surveyed in 12 metropolitan areas does not meet health care standards. ⁽²⁾
- During 2003 to 2005, nearly 250,000 deaths among hospitalized patients were potentially preventable, and Medicare patients who had one or more patient-safety incidents had a one-in-four chance of dying. ⁽³⁾
- Medication errors harm at least 1.5 million people every year, and on average, at least one medication error occurs per hospital patient per day. ⁽⁴⁾
- Fewer than 50 percent of individuals using emergency rooms need that level of expensive treatment. ⁽⁵⁾
- The excess cost to hospitals as a result of medical errors was \$8.6 billion over three years (2003 - 2005). ⁽⁶⁾

To avoid these problems, consumers must replace blind trust in medical professionals with intelligent decision-making and collaboration. Being informed and involved in medical decisions can not only help you reduce the chances of medical error, but may also save you money by avoiding waste relating to unnecessary care. It takes time and effort to become an empowered health care consumer, but the rewards are worth it!



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So how can you minimize the chance of having a medical mishap affect you? The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations is the nation's predominant standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Over the past several years, the Joint Commission has launched a new patient safety campaign. The goal of this campaign is to encourage patients to become informed and active members of the health care team. Part of this new education campaign includes publications like, *Speak Up: Help Prevent Errors in Your Care.* ⁽⁷⁾



The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organization has launched a new patient safety campaign.

References

- (1) *Employee Health Benefits: 2007 Annual Survey.* The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. 11 September, 2007.
- (2) *The Quality of Health Care Delivered to Adults in the United States,* New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM). Volume 348:2635-2645, Number 26. June 2003.
- (3) HealthGrades, Inc.® *Patient Safety in American Hospitals Study.* Golden, Colo. April 2007. Available at www.healthgrades.com
- (4) Phillip Aspden et al. (eds.), *Preventing Medication Errors.* Institute of Medicine. National Academy Press. Washington, D.C. 2007.
- (5) Dartmouth Atlas Project. www.dartmouthatlas.org.
- (6) HealthGrades, Inc.® "Hospital Errors Rise to Three Percent..." HealthGrades press release. 02 April, 2007. www.hcqualitycommission.gov/final.
- (7) www.jointcommission.org/GeneralPublic/Speak+Up/.

Informative newsletter series

Future newsletters in this series will provide resources and references, such as websites and books, to guide you in making decisions about health care quality and costs. You will learn more about what you can do to become more informed and involved in your health care. The topics of these newsletters are the following:

Newsletter 2: *Finding Information on Health Issues*

This newsletter will help you find information and resources about your health concerns – whether they are mild or serious.

Newsletter 3: *Choosing a Hospital*

Not all hospitals and medical facilities are equal. This newsletter will help you find information about quality and cost of hospitals in your area.

Newsletter 4: *Choosing a Physician*

A good physician can literally mean the difference between life and death when it comes to your health. This newsletter will help you find the information to compare physicians on both quality and price.

Newsletter 5: *Partnering with Your Personal Physician*

Gives you tips to help you develop a partnership with your physician so both of you are actively involved in making the best health care decisions for you and your family.

Newsletter 6: *Health Insurance Options*

Choosing a health insurance option that fits your budget and still meets all your quality criteria can be a daunting task. This newsletter will give you tips on what to do.

Newsletter 7: *Controlling Health Care Costs*

With the right information, you can reduce your health care costs. This newsletter will instruct you on how to find and use pricing information for prescription drugs, treatments, office visits, and more.

Newsletter 8: *Pursuing a Healthy Lifestyle*

By pursuing a healthy lifestyle, you can often prevent a need for medical health care. This newsletter will help increase the quality of your health through healthy living.

Newsletter 9: *Preventing Disease and Illness*

Some diseases and illnesses can be prevented. This newsletter will help you find the necessary information to take the right steps toward disease prevention.

Newsletter 10: *Managing a Chronic Illness*

Having a chronic illness is not always as bleak as it first appears. There are many options available to help you manage the cost and quality of your health care in this situation, including alternative treatments and lifestyle adjustments. This newsletter will instruct you on how to find this information.

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