

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

‘Speak Up’ to Prevent Errors in Your Child’s Care

Joint Commission campaign helps parents ask the right questions

(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Ill. – August 5, 2009) Medical errors are a serious problem, and the consequences of these mistakes can be especially devastating for children. A 2008 study by the National Initiative for Children’s Health Care Quality showed that 1 in 15 hospitalized children are harmed by medication errors.

The Joint Commission is launching a national campaign to help parents make a difference in their children’s care by asking the right questions and being actively involved, whether it’s at the doctor’s office, in the hospital, or even at home. The new education campaign is part of The Joint Commission’s award-winning Speak Up™ program.

“Your child’s health and safety are important to doctors, nurses and other caregivers, and the best way to make sure that your child receives the care that he or she needs is by being an active member of the health care team,” says Mark R. Chassin, M.D., M.P.P., M.P.H., president, The Joint Commission. “Through the Speak Up™ program, The Joint Commission is helping parents by giving them the tools they need to ask the right questions and take action before, during and after their child’s care.”

The new Speak Up™ campaign offers parents questions and answers that can help them navigate many common, yet complex health care situations. Among the topics are:

- Preparing for your child’s visit to the doctor’s office
- Symptoms that mean you need to take your child to the doctor or hospital immediately
- What you should ask the doctor
- Taking medicine safely
- Having a medical or laboratory test
- Going to the hospital
- Having a safe operation

The framework of the Speak Up™ program urges patients, including parents and guardians of children to:

- **Speak Up™** if you have questions or concerns. If you still don't understand, ask again. It's your body and you have a right to know.
- **Pay attention** to the care you get. Always make sure you're getting the right treatments and medicines by the right health care professionals. Don't assume anything.
- **Educate yourself** about your illness. Learn about the medical tests you get, and your treatment plan.
- **Ask a trusted family member or friend** to be your advocate (advisor or supporter).
- **Know what medicines you take and why you take them.** Medicine errors are the most common health care mistakes.
- **Use a hospital, clinic, surgery center, or other type of health care organization** that has been carefully checked out. For example, The Joint Commission visits hospitals to see if they are meeting The Joint Commission's quality standards.
- **Participate in all decisions about your treatment.** You are the center of the health care team.

Speak Up™ brochures also are available on pain relief, understanding caregivers, medical tests, recovering after leaving the hospital, preventing medication mistakes, preventing infections, preparing to become a living organ donor, avoiding wrong site surgery and preventing errors in care. Brochures can be found at <http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp/>. All of the Speak Up™ brochures are available in an easy-to-read format and in Spanish.

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Founded in 1951, The Joint Commission seeks to continuously improve the safety and quality of care provided to the public through the provision of health care accreditation and related services that support performance improvement in health care organizations. The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 16,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including more than 8,000 hospitals and home care organizations, and more than 6,200 other health care organizations that provide long term care, behavioral health care, laboratory and ambulatory care services. In addition, The Joint Commission also provides certification of more than 600 disease-specific care programs, primary stroke centers, and health care staffing services. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation's oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Learn more about The Joint Commission at www.jointcommission.org.