



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Commission Urges Americans to ‘Speak Up’ to Prevent Falls

Tips for hospital patients, nursing home residents and patients at home
(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Ill. – July 28, 2010) Each year, millions of people—from elderly nursing home residents to hospitalized children to women who have just given birth—are injured by falls in health care facilities and homes. The Joint Commission today launched a national campaign to help Americans reduce the risk of falling.

The new education campaign, which is part of The Joint Commission’s award-winning Speak Up™ program, recognizes that falls are a serious problem. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that falls are the second leading cause of injury-related deaths for people ages 65 and older, and are the most common cause of injuries and hospital admissions among the elderly. (Source: CDC, NCHS. Mortality Data Tapes. Hyattsville, MD: the Center, 1998.) Reducing injuries, disabilities and deaths from falls has even been included as part of the Healthy People 2010 program. The national Healthy People 2010 objectives from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services identify the most significant preventable threats to health and establish national goals to reduce these threats.

“Falls can cause serious to life-threatening injuries; however, there are steps people can take at home or in a health care facility to reduce their risk of falling. We want people to be aware of these simple yet important precautions and avoid preventable injuries,” says Mark R. Chassin, M.D., M.P.P., M.P.H., president, The Joint Commission.

The new Speak Up™ campaign offers tips and actions that will help people reduce the risk of falling, whether at home or in a medical facility. Among the topics are:

- Taking care of your health—this includes exercise to improve strength and balance, staying hydrated, having an eye exam regularly and talking to your doctor about any side effects from medications that might cause drowsiness or confusion.
- Taking extra precautions—simple actions such as turning on the lights when entering a room, keeping walkways clear, using handrails on stairs, and wearing proper shoes can make a difference.
- Making small changes to your home—using motion sensors or timers for lights, placing nightlights in bedrooms and bathrooms, removing throw rugs, and applying non-slip decals on stairs and in bathtubs to reduce the risk of falls. Home care agencies, personal care and support agencies, or community programs may be available to help you accomplish these tasks if you are older or disabled.
- Taking extra precautions in the hospital or nursing home, for example, people in health care facilities should use the call button to ask for help to get out of bed or go to the bathroom, wear non-slip socks, lower the height of the bed and bed rails, and tell the nurse or doctor if medicine is making you feel dizzy or sick.

The framework of the Speak Up™ program urges patients to:

- **S**peak 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.
- **P**ay attention to the care you are receiving. Make sure you're getting the right treatments by the right health care professionals. Don't assume anything.
- **E**ducate yourself about your diagnosis, the medical tests you are undergoing, and your treatment plan.
- **A**sk a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate.
- **K**now what medications you take and why you take them. Medication errors are the most common health care errors.
- **U**se 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 The Joint Commission.

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

Speak Up™ brochures also are available on preventing errors in medical care for children, finding pain relief, understanding caregivers, understanding 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 health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value. The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 17,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including more than 9,500 hospitals and home care organizations, and more than 6,300 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 1,000 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.