



Users' Guide
It's my health!

10 suggestions
for Citizens *to access health care facilities*

1. Documents

When visiting a doctor, you should always have with you any documents concerning your health (including your blood group) and remember always to take them with you every time you access a doctor, or to any other kind of health facility. If you should see a radiologist, you should also remember to take any X-rays that you have with you.

2. Before doing any exam, clinical examination, hospitalization

You should ask whether there is anything that you must not eat or drink, and about further instructions that you may need to know. You should inform your doctor whether you have any other illnesses and if you are currently taking medication.

Just for women: You must tell your doctor if you are, or if you think that you might be pregnant. If you are pregnant, you must inform the radiologist before you have an x-ray.

You must tell friends and family not to visit you in the hospital if they have an infectious virus (e.g. flu, etc..) which could be harmful to you and other patients. As soon as you arrive in the hospital you should state to the nurse and the clinician which one of your relatives is to be informed of your health condition. You should also state to the nurse and clinician who you want to make decisions regarding your health care, in case of an emergency, or anything that could occur which could prevent you from being able to make decisions. In hospitals: You should take slippers to wear instead of other foot wear that may prove dangerous, i.e. flip flops. You should not wear belts, in order to prevent falling. If you have false teeth; or any other prosthesis, you should remember to take a small box with you which you can use to store your possessions.

3. Medicines

You should always have with you a list of the medicines that you use and you should always show it to your doctor. You should also inform your doctor if you are taking alternative medicines, i.e., homeopathic remedies, dietary supplement, herbal teas, or any other natural remedy purchased in herbal shops. You should also inform your clinician of any allergies that you may have and if you are intolerant to any other medicinal mixes. When the clinician has given you the list of medicines that you must take, remember to ask how and when to take them. Also, you should remember to ask if there are any known side effects, and for an explanation how to best cope with these possible side effects. Before you start to take the medication, remember to check the name to ensure that it is the medication that the clinician prescribed. When you do start to take the medication, you must always remember to read the instructions carefully pertaining to dosage, etc. You must immediately report to your GP if you do experience any side effects, or any other feelings of abnormal illness.

4. Introducing oneself

You should always introduce yourself to the clinician, the person who prescribes the medication, performs a test on you, or prepares you for an operation. This is imperative in order for them to know exactly who you are to eliminate the possibility of a mistake being made. You should also make a note of the names of the staff, in case you want to ask for further advise.

5. Habits

When you tell the clinician about your medical condition, you should also inform them of your eating and drinking habits, if you smoke or not, if you are dieting, or if you have ever been on a diet, how many hours sleep you have each night and if you are active or not, i.e., play sports. This information allows the clinician to make a more informed assessment of your medical condition.

6. Allergies

You should always inform your clinician of any allergies you may have, including: foods, metals, latex, animals, materials or anything else.

7. Surgery

If it is required that you have an operation, be observant and make sure that the clinician marks the exact part of the body where the operation should occur. After the surgery, you should ask advice on how best to recover.

8. My treatment

You are encouraged to ask as many questions as you like regarding your treatment (Why have you been given this specific medicine? Why is it necessary? What are their side effects? What are the potential risks of the medicine? Will taking the medicine be disruptive to your leading a normal life?), in order to better understand how to recuperate. Communication between you and your clinician is essential. It is only through communicating with your clinician that you are empowered to understand the process and to be better informed and more aware of any abnormalities, should they occur, during your recuperation. You must always tell the clinician or the nurse of any concerns that you may have, if you are not comfortable with a particular part of the process, or of any discomfort you may be feeling.

When the clinician is telling you about your condition, you should always ask them to repeat things that you are not clear about and to explain all of the alternative therapeutic options that are available to you. You should try to learn as much as possible about your illness, so that you are able to be involved in the decision-making progress. If you are from a different country, you can request a translator or a cultural mediatory to enable you and the clinician to communicate effectively. Before doing any X-rays, you should ask for an explanation about the procedure, i.e., the techniques and methods used, in order to allow you to formulate a better understanding of how all of the devices work to protect you from the negative effects of radiation. Having a better understanding will ensure, not only that you feel more informed about the procedure, but also that you will feel more comfortable in the situation.

9. Wash your hands

Washing one's hands is really important to prevent infections. You should wash your hands and remember to ask for soap if you fail to find any. You should remind clinicians and nurses to wash their hands before treating you. This is indispensable for the prevention of infections.

10. Discharge

Before leaving the hospital, you should ask the clinician and/or nurse what to do next and how to do it. If possible, you should ask the clinician to write down some notes for you, in order to eliminate any doubts that you may have and to ensure that you are absolutely clear about what you must do once you have returned home. Written information that you should ask to be informed about include:

- a) name and phone number of the person to turn to in case you need them.
- b) when (day and time of the day), and where to go for follow up visits.