PATIENT SAFETY, A FIRSTHAND VIEW

It is a known fact that more people die annually from medical error, in both in-patient and out-patient healthcare settings, than die from motor vehicles accidents, breast cancer or HIV. Nearly 100,000 reported medical errors occur each year. As an e- patient, there are actions that you can take to ensure the safety of your care. They include:

•Do not assume anything! Make sure that all health professionals involved in your care have all the important health information about you. Talk with them about what additional data they might need.

•Ask questions. If you have a test, insist on getting the results. If you are given medication, be sure to ask what it is; what it is for; is it the right dosage. If there are pills you do not recognize, do not take them until you talk with your doctor. This is your right.

•Learn about your conditions and treatments. Discuss your healthcare with your doctor, nurse practitioner, physician assistant and/or pharmacist. Check the Internet to see what information you can find. A few of the helpful, unbiased web sites include:

1. Google or Bing search for the most general compilation of available data.
2. http://www.healthfinder.gov/, or institutions sites such as http://www.mayoclinic.org/ or http://www.clevelandclinic.org/. for general information on a variety of health conditions.

3. http://www.medlineplus.gov/, for the most comprehensive health information in one place.

4. http://www.qualitycheck.org/ , a website of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations that provides extensive information on hospitals, sorted by geographic location and including accreditation criteria, special citations and programs.

I have been away from this blog for a while because I spent some real time as a patient, having hip replacement surgery. Although I had complete confidence in my surgeon, I made sure that I fully understood the parameters of my problem, the solution, and the recovery by asking the right questions and conducting my own research to find answers to all of my concerns. Much to my surprise, my hospital experience completely changed from previous in-patient encounters. Everyone diligently washed their hands at one of the antiseptic soap dispensers located in patient rooms and on every floor. That alleviated my biggest fear of staph and mersa infection so prevalent in the hospital environment.

Another concern was the potential for a fall as I knew that the hip replacement would incapacitate my movement for a while. However, I was told to absolutely call for help when I wanted to get out of bed, and the nurses and aides were most pleasant about assisting me. The last time I was in the hospital after surgery the nurse told me I had better learn to get out of bed myself and not bother them. What a turnaround in patient safety!

Because I am familiar with the dangers of medication error, both in the hospital and at the rehab, I also questioned every IV and oral medication that I was given to be sure that the right medication in the right dosage for me was what I received. No one took offense. They appreciated my caution and understanding.

Patient Safety is not an easy goal to accomplish in the stressful healthcare setting. Mistakes are still made. However, when an e-patient opts to become an integral part of the healthcare team many unpleasant medical errors can be averted.