



Understanding My Healthcare Team

It can be hard to understand what your healthcare team is telling you about your care and treatment. This handout has questions and answers to help you understand your team.

What if I don't understand what a member of my healthcare team is saying?

Tell them "I don't understand." I can shake my head to show that "No, I don't understand." I can ask as many questions as I need to. By asking questions, I am helping my team understand what I need.

What can I do if they explain and I still don't understand?

Tell them "I still don't understand" and they will keep explaining until I do. I should not leave until I feel comfortable that I understand everything clearly.

What if my team is in a hurry and doesn't have time for my questions?

Ask them if I need to schedule another appointment when they can answer all of my questions.

What if I do not read or understand English very well?

Interpreters can help me, my family, or my companion who does not speak or understand English very well to communicate with my healthcare team. I do not have to pay for these services. Some important information is already translated into Spanish, Chinese and Russian. I can ask staff to contact the Coordinator of the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Program or I can call 212-263-3762.

If I am deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing, or if any of my family members or companions are, we can have a sign language, tactile or oral interpreter help us communicate with my healthcare team. Interpreters can also help me to understand written information if English is not my preferred language. I can also borrow an assistive listening device to help me communicate. I can ask staff to contact the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program for these and other services or I can call 212-263-0101 or text message dhhp@nyumc.org.

What can I do if I can not read very well?

I should not be embarrassed. I need to tell someone on the staff. They can help explain paper work to me. They may even have paper work that is easy to read and understand.

My doctor's instructions are not clear. Should I try to figure it out myself?

No. Instructions from my doctor or others are important. I should:

- Tell them what I think instructions are.
- Tell them if they need to write down the instructions.
- Tell them if I have a family member or companion who helps me take my medicine so they can talk to my family member or companion, too.



What if I do not understand written instructions that are given to me?

I need to tell my healthcare team that:

- I need to have the instructions read to me.
- I need instructions that are easy to read.
- I need instructions in my language.

What can I do if I don't understand the instructions for my medicine?

Tell my healthcare team if I need help. Tell them:

- I do not understand how to take my medicine.
- I do not understand when to take my medicine.
- What I think the instructions are:
 - how to take
 - when to take
 - how much to take

If I do not understand and I take too much or too little of my medicines, it can be dangerous.

How can I remember all of my medicines?

I will get a form called a Medication Reconciliation form that will list all of my medicines - new and old. If I do not understand the form I can ask for help writing down another list of all the medicines and the amount I take. I should take this list with me every time I go to the doctor.

The doctor says I need to have a "procedure." What does that mean?

A procedure can be:

- an operation
- a treatment
- a test with special equipment

I might be put to sleep or a part of my body might be numbed. I should ask questions about what will be done to me. If I speak another language ask for someone who speaks my language. Even if I am in the emergency room I need to understand what will happen to me.

Informed Consent

What is Informed Consent? Informed consent means that:

- I know how my illness or condition will be treated.
- I agree to the operation or treatment.
- I understand the risks and benefits.
- I know about other treatments available to me.
- I know what can happen if I am not treated.



Should I sign the Informed Consent? I can decide if I will sign the paperwork or not after I understand all that is explained to me. I need to read it carefully and check:

- my name.
- the kind of surgery.
- the risks of surgery.

Before signing I need to make sure that:

- everything on the form is correct.
- I have talked to my doctor about the surgery and asked questions.
- **all** of my questions have been answered. If I do not understand something on the form - I need to speak up and ask!
- I agree to have the surgery

NOTE: Though I may choose not to sign the informed consent I must understand that if I do not sign then my surgery will not happen and my illness or condition may not get better.

I do not understand the paper work I was given to fill out. What can I do?

Ask my healthcare team to explain the paper work. Ask them if they can help me fill it out.

My healthcare team asked me to do something that is against my culture or religion. What can I do?

Tell my team about my culture or my religious beliefs. Explain to them what I need to do. When they know what is important to me, they can better understand how to take care of me. There may be a way to meet the team's needs and my needs.

Where can I get more information about my illness or condition?

I can ask the Patient & Family Resource Center, NYU Langone Medical Center's consumer health library, for help finding the newest and best health information written just for patients. Come in to the library from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at 530 First Ave., Rm. 103, or call 212.263.7438. I can also email any questions to: patientlibrary@nyumc.org.

*This handout is adapted from The Joint Commission (www.jointcommission.org) Speak Up™ program materials. The goal of the Speak Up™ program is to help patients become more informed and involved in their healthcare. Created 01/2009