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Editor's note: This article looks at the patient's role in the Air Force's Patient Safety program.

From minor to severe care, patients should empower themselves with the knowledge and self-confidence to reduce the possibilities of something going wrong during their health care visit.

The patient safety program intends to educate patients on reporting, monitoring and analyzing health care treatment with resources to determine negative outcomes, either potential or actual. An important part of patient safety is fully empowering patients to be involved in their medical treatment, which has always been a part of "Patient Rights and Responsibilities."

Essential steps to empower patients in the health care system:

1. **Ask** questions and voice your concerns
2. **Know** your medication
3. **Request** all results from tests and procedures
4. **Discuss** treatment options with your doctor
5. Make sure you **understand** your plan of treatment

According to DoD 6000.14, "Beneficiaries have the right and responsibility to fully participate in all decisions related to their health care."

The medical treatment facility is responsible for providing high-quality health care. At the same time, patients are expected and encouraged to assume reasonable accountability for their own health care.

By following the definitions of ORM, a patient can better understand the health care process and will be better informed of the course of action. Simply being aware

of the ORM standards of care can empower the patient to achieve the health care they desire.

When the patient *identifies possible health hazards*, the patient is actively seeking information on the possible dangers in the procedures to be chosen.

"I identify medical hazards to my doctor through question and answer paperwork, or verbally. I have different comfort levels with my doctor(s) depending on the topic," said Susan\*. "In general, I think my doctor(s) responds positively to my concerns. If I have a concern, they address it and take the appropriate action."

When armed with essential information, the patient is better able to *assess the risk* pertinent to the procedure and make an educated decision about the procedure.

"When I identify a possible risk in my medical treatment, I react by weighing gain to risk," said Sandra\*, an overseas patient who has used on- and off-base care. "If the risk is too great, then I look for something else, if there is a choice, in order to correct the situation."

Once the risks have been assessed, the patient can then *analyze the control measures*, or the options to the procedure.

"The aspect of a doctor's visit that I feel I can control is the communication," said Sandra. "The roles are defined. The physician is responsible for making the diagnosis and prescribing the course of treatment. The patient is responsible for adhering to the course of treatment."

By assessing the options, the patient can *make control decisions* on the alternatives to health care.

"I think a doctor's visit is controlled equally by both patient and physician. As the patient, you need to tell the doctor all you can about the symptoms or problems you are having," stated Susan. "Hopefully, the doctor understands what you are saying and will take any necessary steps. I believe I have partial responsibility for my medical treatment."

Next, it is the patient's responsibility to *implement the necessary risk controls*.

"I tell my physician if I have a concern or problem with any health care issues," said Susan.

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“By all that I hold sacred and with the understanding that...the patient must also conduce the cure, I shall endeavor according to my ability and judgment.”

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—Excerpt from *An Oath for Patients*

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# THE AIM OF PATIENT SAFETY

“Also, I make sure to fill out any and *all* surveys pertaining to my health care facility and doctor that are either at the office or mailed to me.”

The final step in risk management is *supervising and reviewing* the appropriate actions needed to accomplish the decision made by the patient.

“I address any concerns first with my doctor,” stated Susan. “If I feel that is not working, I talk to my health care provider. If at that point I still feel the issue has not been fully addressed, I then write a letter to someone within the chain of command that I feel will listen.”

In March 2002, the Joint Commission, together with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), launched a national program to urge patients to take a role in preventing health care errors by becoming active, involved and informed participants on the health care team. In 2003, the “Speak Up” initiative was expanded to include tips to help patients prepare for surgery and make sure that they have the correct procedure performed at the correct site on their body.

In 1999, the Institute of Medicine published “To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System,” which emphasized the dramatic amount of preventable medical problems in the U.S. As a result, Congress mandated federal health care facilities to focus on preventing medical errors leading to the establishment of DoD

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“Should I elect to receive medical treatment and should the remedy go awry, I shall not rush to jurisprudence...Should I expire...I ask that my loved ones not attempt to assign blame...upon anyone.”

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—*Excerpt from An Oath for Patients*

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Instruction 6025.17, Military Health System Patient Safety Program, to implement patient safety programs in the military.

Throughout the U.S. and the military, the health care system has dedicated itself to improving the safety of all patients. Public demands, risk management and new regulatory requirements are forcing hospitals and physicians to reevaluate their systems and practices in order to ensure the safety of their patients.

ORM	&	Patient Safety
Identify the Hazards		Speak up if you have questions of concerns
Assess the Risk		Know your medical procedure options
Analyze Control Measures		Make sure you get the results of any test or procedure
Make Control Decisions		Talk with your doctor and health care team about your options in treatment
Implement Risk Controls		Keep a list of all the medicines you take
Supervise and Review		Make sure you understand your plan of treatment