

# IF YOU'VE EXPERIENCED HARM AS A PATIENT...

**FOR THE PATIENTS**



## YOU'VE BEEN HARMED, NOW WHAT?

Without safeguarding processes, patients can experience physical or emotional harm – such as infections or diagnostic, procedural and medication errors. In these unfortunate events, it is critical to quickly identify the problem, share your story and seek accountability.

The healthcare system can be overwhelming and intimidating, but when you speak up about unfair, unethical, or harmful treatment, you are doing your part to keep yourself and others safe. Read on to learn what to do if you've been harmed – and share this information with someone else who could benefit from it.

Remember, we're all patients at some point in our lifetime.

### FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO SHARE YOUR STORY



#### Take care of yourself.

You just experienced a stressful and maybe even traumatizing event. Turn to trusted friends or family for support. Contact the [Patient Safety Action Network](#) to connect with other people who've been in your shoes. They want to help.



#### Record Everything.

Document what happened:

- Take pictures.
- Detail timelines, procedures, medications and clinicians.
- Save emails.
- Talk to friends or family members who work in healthcare.

The federal government has [guidelines](#) in place that say your doctor needs to provide you with your digital records at little or no cost to you. Get them and compare them with your own documents.



#### Speak up.

Let your doctor and hospital know if you've experienced medical harm. Hospitals and doctors are not required to report negative outcomes. According to HHS, [93 percent of serious adverse events](#) in hospitals were undetected by their own systems. Medical errors are due to faulty systems or processes. This means sharing your story may be the only way this information is made public and could help fix problems.



#### Zero tolerance.

BIPOC patients are more likely to experience harm, have these incidences go unreported or have their medical concerns dismissed. If you believe you have received improper or substandard care because of your race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, or due to your English-speaking skills, [contact](#) the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For patients with limited English-speaking skills, you have the right to ask for a translator.



#### Report it.

If you've experienced preventable harm, it's important to file a written complaint so the incident is investigated internally. When reporting, stick to the facts. If you need support navigating the system, consider seeking out a [patient advocate](#) for help.

Contact your [state medical board](#), [state health department](#) and the hospital. Follow up and, don't be shy, ask for updates. Don't let them delay or deny your request for an investigation. While legal protections for medical providers may limit your ability to file a case in court, you can still contact a malpractice lawyer for their advice.

## YOUR VOICE MATTERS

It's important to be aware of [one caveat](#) when reporting patient harm - the medical review process isn't always fair to the patient. Why? Well, the medical board review committees are mostly composed of doctors who can be lenient with their colleagues. It doesn't help that the patient's report must meet a higher standard of proof than in a court of law.

While medical charts are included in the review process, certain events are not captured at all, or only confidentially. (There's even the expression, "If it's not in the chart...it didn't happen.") All of these factors stack up against the patient.

That being said, if you have been harmed, fight the urge to keep it to yourself. In addition to helping yourself, your effort could benefit others. When a doctor or facility is reported multiple times, it's more likely that disciplinary action will be taken. Your voice matters and so does your health.

### LEARN MORE BY VISITING

- [www.patientsafety.citizen.org](http://www.patientsafety.citizen.org)
- [www.littleton-roadph.com/forthepatients](http://www.littleton-roadph.com/forthepatients)
- [www.patientsafetymovement.org](http://www.patientsafetymovement.org)

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