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To: All Employees Statewide

From: Chief, Branch of Human Resources

Subject: Health Benefits and Patient Safety

At this time of the year, we are given the opportunity to choose a new health carrier or remain with the one that we chose earlier. Now would be an opportune time for us to think about what we can do to improve the safety of our health care. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is asking enrollees in the Federal Health Benefits program to do so.

Medical error and patient safety are not well understood by most Americans. Every hour, many individuals die in a hospital due to avoidable errors and others become disabled. Many patients receive the wrong medicine, tests, and/or diagnosis. By asking questions, learning more, and understanding your risks, you can improve the safety of your health care and that of your family members.

Enrollees are being asked to take the following Five Steps to Safer Health Care:

**FIVE STEPS TO SAFER HEALTH CARE**

1. **Speak up if you have questions or concerns.** Choose a doctor who you feel comfortable talking to about your health and treatment. Take a relative or friend with you if this will help you ask questions and understand the answers. It is okay to ask questions and to expect answers you understand.

2. **Keep a list of all of the medicines you take.** Tell your doctor and your pharmacist about the medicines you take, including over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and dietary supplements like vitamins and herbals. Tell them about any drug allergies you have. Ask the pharmacist about side effects and what foods or other things to avoid while taking the medicine. When you get your medicine, read the label including the warnings. Make sure it is what your doctor ordered and you know how to use it. If the medicine looks different than you expected, ask the pharmacist about it.

3. **Make sure you get the results of any test or procedure.** Ask your doctor or nurse when you will get the results of the test or procedure. If you do not get them when you expected B in person, on the telephone, or in the mail B do not assume the results are fine. Call your doctor and ask for them. Ask what the results mean for your care.

4. **Talk with your doctor and health care team about your options if you need hospital care.** If you have more than one hospital to choose from, ask your doctor which one has the best care and results for your condition. Hospitals do a good job of treating a wide range of problems. However, for some procedures (such as heart bypass
surgery), research shows results often are better at hospitals doing a lot of these procedures. Also, before you leave the hospital, be sure to ask about follow-up care and be sure you understand the instructions.

5. **Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery.** Ask your doctor and surgeon: Who will take charge of my care while I am in the hospital? Exactly what will you be doing? How long will it take? What will happen after the surgery? How can I expect to feel during the recovery? Tell the surgeon, anesthesiologist, and nurses if you have allergies or have ever had a bad reaction to anesthesia. Make sure you, your doctor and your surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during the operation.

It is no longer the total responsibility of the medical profession for medical care. We must take an active role in seeing to it that we get the care we should have. Your medical professional should be willing to discuss these issues with you.

**Districts with Unions** are reminded to notify their unions of this IB and satisfy any bargaining obligations before implementation. Your servicing Human Resources Office or Labor Relations Specialist can provide you assistance in this matter.

Signed by
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