



Patient Guide

We are all patients at some point in our lives. This guide helps you to find ways to ensure that your treatment is always safe. It gives you tips on how to guarantee safe treatment and information on the rights and safety of the patient.



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10 tips for safer treatment

1. **Sufficient information**

The health care staff will need sufficient information on your symptoms and illnesses, as well as your current contact information. Please let them know of any changes in your personal information.

2. **Confirmation of identity**

Please feel free to remind the staff members if they forget to ask you about your personal details, for example, before they examine you, give you medicine or process your test results.

3. **Notes**

Make a list of your concerns or the questions you want to ask. Ask the staff for written information to help you remember.

4. **Do not hesitate to ask**

You can ask about treatment options and how your treatment will progress. You should also remember to ask about your medicines and their side-effects. Make sure you have understood everything correctly.

5. **Medication**

It is important that the health care staff and the pharmacy have an up-to-date list of your medications. You can ask the staff to check your medication. Do not change your medication on your own.

6. **Following the instructions**

Follow any treatment instructions you are given. Tell the staff if following the instructions is difficult for you.

7. **Participation**

Get involved when your treatment is planned and decisions are made about it. Give feedback on your treatment.

8. **Pain**

Tell the staff if you have any pain and where it is and how it feels.

9. **Bring a friend or relative**

You can bring a friend or relative to help you with your treatment.

10. **If you have any concerns**

If you have any concerns, mention them right away. You can contact the staff even after your treatment.



You have rights as a patient

Status and rights of the patient

Patients' rights are provided under the Act on the Status and Rights of Patients. The Act applies to all health care. It guarantees you the right to

- receive treatment within the prescribed maximum waiting times
- be treated fairly and to receive high-quality care, taking into account your expectations and concerns
- use Finnish or Swedish and, where possible, your mother tongue if it is some other language
- receive information on your state of health, treatment options and their effects
- check your own patient records and, if necessary, request corrections to them
- the confidentiality of your health information
- the opportunity to discuss your treatment options
- refuse treatment
- have your health care wishes respected.

Read more about the status and rights of the patient on the websites of the Regional State Administrative Agency (www.avi.fi) and Valvira (www.valvira.fi/en).

You can complain about medical treatment

If you have problems with your treatment or if you are not happy with it, you should raise the issue with your doctor or nurse as soon as possible. Problems are easier to resolve when the treatment is ongoing instead of afterwards. Then, it is still possible to fix or change many issues.

If necessary, you can send a written objection to the director in charge of health care in the unit where you are being treated. The director must investigate the issues you have raised in your objection and respond to you within a reasonable time frame, in about one month.

You can also appeal to the supervisory authorities, i.e. the Regional State Administrative Agency supervising your service provider, or the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira). Valvira handles only cases of serious adverse events, such as debilitating injuries or death as a result of malpractice.



You can report patient injuries

If you suspect that a patient injury has occurred during treatment, you can apply to the Finnish Patient Insurance Centre for compensation. In most cases, a compensation application must be made within three years from when the person eligible for compensation became aware, or should have become aware, of the injury.

The Finnish Patient Insurance Centre is responsible for compensating for patient injuries occurring in Finland. On the basis of the Patient Injuries Act, the Centre decides on whether the patient is eligible for compensation under patient insurance. The Finnish Patient Insurance Centre is an insurance institution and it handles insurance matters only.

For more information visit the website of the Finnish Patient Insurance Centre at **www.pvk.fi/en**.

The patient ombudsman will inform you of your rights

All health care units must have an appointed patient ombudsman. The ombudsman will inform you or your friend or relative of your rights, where necessary, and is duty-bound to help in drawing up observations, complaints or compensation claims. The patient ombudsman will not, however, comment on the quality of your treatment and care. You can get the patient ombudsman's contact information from your health care unit.

When you are seeking treatment

How can you promote your patient safety when seeking treatment?

We all have the possibility and the right to influence both the outcome of our treatment and our patient safety. We are the best experts on our health because we know our own medical histories best. That is why it is important that your treatment is planned together by you and professionals.

What is patient safety?

Patient safety is the basis of good treatment. It is also the joint aim of the staff, the patient and his or her friends and relatives.

Patient safety means that the patient receives the right treatment at the right time and in the right way, with no harm being caused. Patients and friends or relatives can contribute to patient safety.



Health care services

Your municipality will deliver your primary health care services, either by itself or in collaboration with other municipalities. Your municipality's website and call centre will give you information on health care services and tell you how to book appointments and which health centre you should turn to.

If you are employed, your employer will probably provide you with primary health care services, but not dental care. When starting with a new employer, check what kinds of health care services you are entitled to. If your finances allow, you can also use private health care services.

If you live outside your municipality on a regular or long-term basis due to work, studies, leisure, or in order to be near friends or relatives, you can get health care services in the municipality where you reside based on a treatment plan drawn up by the health centre in your home municipality. You must arrange this at least three weeks in advance.

Further information is available from your health centre.

You can choose your service provider

You can choose the health centre in your municipality from which you will seek primary health care services (such as appointments with a doctor or nurse). As of 2014, you have had the right to seek treatment at any health centre or hospital in Finland. You are advised to choose the service provider that best meets your treatment needs.

If you change your service provider, give written notification of this to both your new and old service provider. You will be able to receive treatment at your new health centre within three weeks, at the most, after your written notification has been received.

When you need specialised health care

In general, you should go to your local hospital for specialised health care. You can also go to another hospital if it better guarantees your rights as a speaker of the Finnish, Swedish or Sami language, or if it will ensure you the best possible care.

You must choose your service provider together with your doctor so that you will get the treatment you need.

For follow-up treatment, you will be referred back to the doctor or nurse who treated you before, whenever this ensures you the appropriate treatment.

You can find, compare and assess social and health care services and service providers at **www.palveluvaaka.fi**. The renewed Palveluvaaka.fi will be launched in 2015.

Find out where you should go for urgent treatment

Find out in advance where you should go in case you need urgent treatment. During weekdays, you can ask your health centre or the local hospital, and in emergencies you can call 112.

Emergency services in the evenings, nights and on weekends are provided by only a few units which are better and more extensively equipped. In emergencies you can go to your nearest emergency clinic.

To find out where to go for urgent treatment:

- Call your health centre, or
- Call your local hospital, or
- Call your municipality's service number for advice on health-related matters (if such a number is available in your municipality), or
- In emergencies call the emergency number 112.

Taking active part in your treatment will ensure its success.

When you are receiving treatment

How can you promote your own patient safety when receiving treatment?

There are a number of ways you can promote the safety of your treatment. It is important that you tell the health care staff enough about your own situation, because you are the best expert on your medical history. Talk about your illness and symptoms with your doctor and others involved in your case. In this way, you can ensure that you receive the best possible treatment.

Help to improve the information flow

Many health care errors are the result of poor communication when the patient is moved from one unit to another, for scans or other tests, or for follow-up treatment.

When receiving treatment, please ensure that the staff are in possession of accurate and sufficient information about you, such as the main illness in question, your medication, possible pregnancy, breastfeeding or allergies.

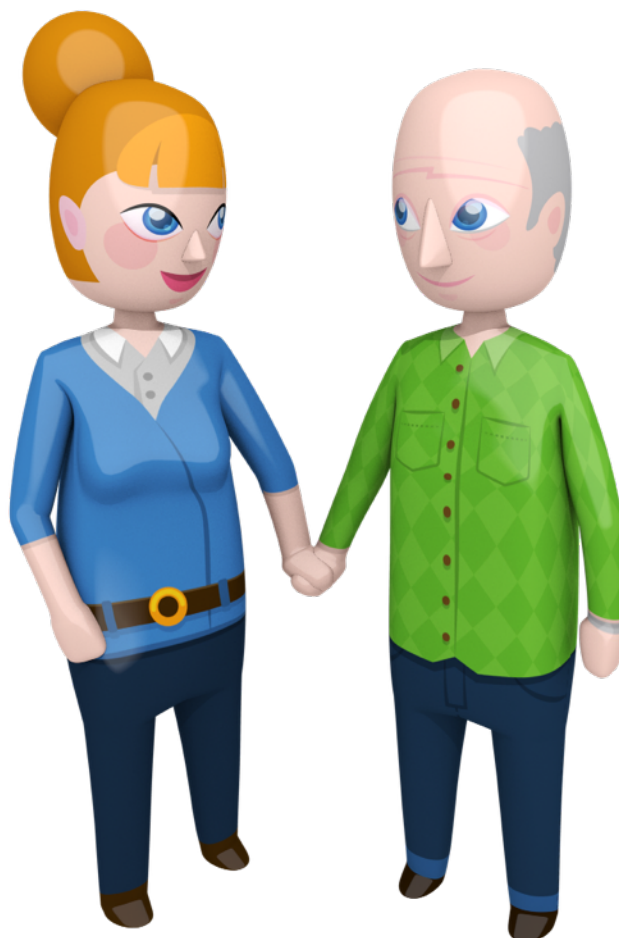
You yourself can help to ensure a good result by asking the staff, nurses and doctors what is being investigated, why, when and where. They will provide you with instructions on how to prepare for examinations. Please follow those instructions.

Make sure that your personal details are correct.

Patients with the same name can be confused with one another. The staff will ask for your name and personal identity code to ensure that they are indeed handling your patient records, test results or findings.

Do not hesitate to remind the staff to do this if they seem to forget. This is particularly important when staff take blood samples, perform procedures or give you medicine.

Make sure that your contact information is up to date.



Talking is the basis of efficient and safe treatment

An open dialogue between the patient and the health care staff is the basis of a safe treatment relationship. Treatment should be based on respect for your right to self-determination.

In a confidential discussion, you and the staff can decide together on the best possible treatment for you. There are no symptoms or problems you cannot tell the staff about.

Prepare for your visit to a health centre or hospital. Consider the issues you want to discuss and note them down, if necessary, to ensure that you do not forget anything that you consider important. You can also ask friends or relatives for support.

Tell the staff openly about your concerns and problems to help ensure the success of your treatment.

If you have problems in speaking or hearing, or if you do not understand Finnish, make sure in advance that you receive the help you need.

You can take a friend or relative with you

You may feel safer if a friend or relative accompanies you on your visit. When you receive important information on your treatment or procedures, it may be good to have more than one pair of ears present. This means that you will have someone to talk to and to support you after your visit.

Tell the staff about your health problems and lifestyle

Anything you can tell the staff about your state of health or lifestyle will help them to investigate the cause of your symptoms. You should give them the most detailed description you can of your situation. Your lifestyle will not affect the quality of treatment you receive.

Before your visit, think of any questions you may want answered and note them down. Do not hesitate to ask – there are no silly questions. If the answer is not clear enough, ask again. If necessary, make notes to help your memory.

Be prepared to answer the doctor's questions. The questions will vary depending on your symptoms and situation. Questions relating to your current state of health can include the following:

- What kinds of problems do you have?
- How long have you had them?
- Is there anything that makes your problems better or worse?
- What do you think is the cause of your problems?
- Do you have any allergies? Tell the doctor about your drug or other allergies.
- Do you smoke or drink, and what about your diet and exercise?
- Have you had problems with balance or have you fallen in the past six months?

- Do you have any inflammations at the moment?
- Do you use assistive devices of any kind?
- Are you pregnant or do you think you might be, or are you breastfeeding?

Questions related to previous illnesses and their treatment can include the following:

- Have you been or are you seriously ill?
- Have you received hospital treatment?
- Have you had surgery or undergone other procedures?
- Do you have any artificial joints, a vascular prosthesis, pacemaker, or have you had an aortic valve replacement?
- Do you have any hereditary illnesses in your family?

Keep your medication list up to date

The staff need to know about your medications in order to give you the safest possible treatment. When starting you on new medicine, it is important to know whether it is compatible with your other prescription and non-prescription medicines, herbal medicines and dietary supplements. Drug interactions can reduce or boost the effectiveness of a medicine, which can be dangerous. You must also tell the health care staff about any drug allergies.

Make a list of any medication you use regularly or occasionally. Add any non-prescription medicines, herbal medicines, vitamins and dietary supplements you are using to the list. To ensure that your medication is safe, take this list with you when going to a new health care provider or to a pharmacy.

You can ask your doctor to print out a list of your medicines, so that you know which medicines the doctor has prescribed for you. Remember to update your own list if there are any changes to your medication.

Electronic prescriptions

An electronic prescription is a prescription the doctor writes and signs electronically and saves in a centralised, national database known as the Prescription Centre. All your electronic prescriptions and pharmacy dispensing details are stored in the database.

Even if your service provider is using electronic prescriptions, you still have the right to a paper prescription if you would like one. You can also get or renew prescriptions by telephone.

Using the online 'My Kanta' service, you can check your own health information and electronic prescriptions, but not your paper, telephone and faxed prescriptions, as they are not stored in the Prescription Centre. You can check how long your prescriptions are valid and whether any medicines remain uncollected. You can even print out a summary

of your electronic prescriptions. Log into the service using your online banking ID or electronic ID card (HST card).

Electronic prescriptions improve patient safety. With your consent, your doctor or pharmacy can check your overall medication and prevent overlaps and harmful drug interactions.

For more information on electronic prescriptions and My Kanta see **www.kanta.fi/en**.

Ask for a European prescription

If you need a European prescription, you can ask your doctor to write one for you. With a European prescription you can get medicines from pharmacies in the EU countries, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. European prescriptions are usually written for the active ingredient rather than for the commercial name of the medicine. The patient first pays for the medicine in full and then applies to Kela for reimbursement.

Take care of your hand hygiene

Hospital infections are common, and they cause a large number of the problems that develop during hospital treatment. Most such infections are spread through hand contact. For this reason, it is important that the staff, your visitors, you and other patients practice good hand hygiene.

Wash your hands thoroughly after using the toilet, after touching other people and before eating. In addition, use the hand sanitiser as instructed. If you notice that someone, be it staff, visitors or other patients, do not wash their hands and use the hand sanitiser properly, you have the right to point this out.

HAND HYGIENE

It's everyone's business!

Infections can best be prevented in health care services when everyone – staff, patients and visitors – practices good hand hygiene.

- Most bacteria and viruses are contagious by touch. Even the microbes that cause common cold are easily spread through hand contact.
- Many illnesses cause a weakening of the body's resistance, which means that hospital patients are more susceptible than usual to infections.
- Using a sanitiser is the best way to prevent microbes from spreading through your hands. This will help prevent patients from contracting infections.
- At home and in everyday life, washing with soap and water is effective enough for preventing the spread of microbes.

When to use the sanitiser?

Every time you enter or leave a ward, a clinic or a patient room.

...

Before meals.

...

After you cough or blow your nose.

...

Before and after touching a wound or a dressing.

...

Before and after touching urinary catheters, canulae or similar items.

...

After going to the WC or at any time when your hands are dirty, first wash with soap and water and then use the sanitiser.

How to use the sanitiser?

1

FINGERTIPS



With dry hands, take a liberal amount of sanitiser (2 doses) in the palm of one hand. Dip your fingertips in the sanitiser in your palm. Repeat with the fingertips of the other hand.

2

THUMBS



Spread the sanitiser all over your hands, including between the fingers and on the thumbs.

3

PALMS



Rub your hands together until they are dry.



"Patient safety with skill" working group

Prepare for medical examinations

Some medical tests and examinations require preparation from you. You will receive instructions on this in advance.

If you do not receive sufficient information, you can ask:

- Why is a sample being taken or an examination performed?
- What are the risks?
- Are there any alternatives?
- When will I be examined?
- How should I prepare?
- What should I do after the examination?

Make sure that you are given the examination results:

- It can take time to get examination results or other medical statements.
- If you do not get the results immediately, you can lower your risks by asking the following questions, for example:
- How and when will I receive information on the results?
- Whom should I contact if the information does not arrive or if I have anything to ask?
- What happens next?

Tell the staff if you still are uncertain about anything. You can also request your results in writing.

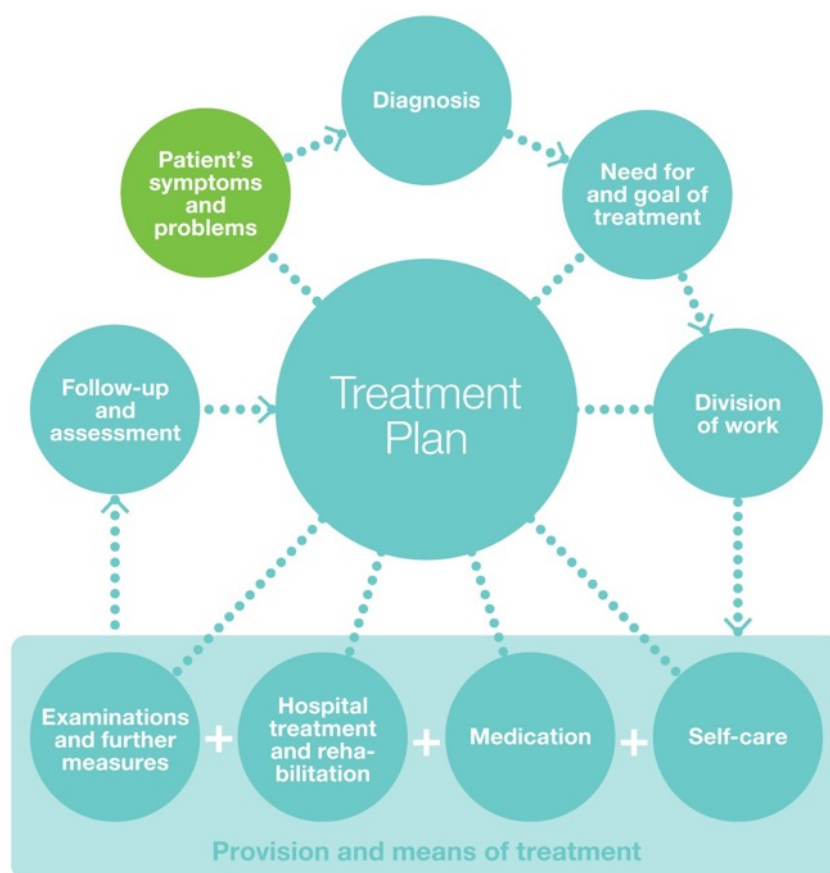
A treatment plan forms the basis of your treatment

As a patient, you have a right to a treatment plan. The Health Care Act requires such a plan in the case of non-urgent treatment. Do not hesitate to request for a treatment plan if you have any long-term illnesses. A treatment plan helps to safely coordinate the treatment of all your diseases and to ensure that your treatments are compatible and that they are completed according to plan. The patient and the health care staff draw up the treatment plan together.

Your treatment plan will have information on all of your health problems and any treatments planned. The following are entered in the treatment plan: the diagnosis, need for and aim of treatment, who will do what, the delivery and methods of treatment, follow-up and evaluation, and medication. Also, the things that you yourself are responsible for are listed in the treatment plan.

Contact the social worker at your hospital if you need information on your social benefits or your right to them. The social worker will, for example, help you to apply for benefits

and to solve any financial problems. Further information is also available from various patient organisations.



The doctor and the patient draw up the treatment plan together

Doctor:

- Draws up a treatment plan together with you.
- Decides on any medical examinations, diagnoses and treatment. Takes account of your opinion.

Patient:

- As the patient, you have the right to sufficient information on the treatment and related risks to enable you to participate in decisions made on your treatment.
- You have the right to present your wishes and express your needs with respect to treatment.
- You have the right to refuse any treatment offered. In such cases, you will be offered an alternative form of treatment.

- You can follow the progress of your treatment plan. Follow the plan and, when necessary, get in touch with your service provider.

Do not hesitate to ask

You may have many questions about your illness. It is important that you know about the issues important to you. You can ask the following questions, for example:

- Does the treatment have any side-effects or risks?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the treatment options?
- What will happen if I do not receive treatment?
- What are the treatment alternatives?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?
- When will the treatment begin? How long will it take?
- What should I do or take into consideration to ensure the best possible result?
- Who can I contact if something is troubling me?
- Where can I find more information on my illness and its treatment?
- If my treatment is transferred to, say, a health centre, how should I proceed?

Give feedback and express your wishes

Do not hesitate to give feedback on your treatment. If you wish, you can also express your thanks. Remember that the health care staff cannot read your mind. If you wish, you can ask your health care staff about the activities and peer support arranged by patient organisations. Your patient organisation can give you valuable additional information and support.

You will ensure the best possible treatment for yourself by cooperating with the health care staff.

How will your treatment continue?

How will your follow-up treatment be arranged?

When you need follow-up treatment, you will get a plan for follow-up treatment and, where necessary, for rehabilitation. The plans are always drawn up together with you. This will ensure that your treatment runs smoothly. Take active part in the drawing up of your follow-up treatment plan and do not hesitate to ask if something is troubling you. Tell the staff how you would like your follow-up treatment to be arranged.



Important post-treatment information

- If you wish, you can take a friend or relative with you to the planning session for follow-up treatment.
- Hold on to your treatment summaries (epicrisis) and prescriptions. The epicrisis is a report summarising the progress of your illness and the treatment you received.
- Follow all the instructions you have received regarding your medication, treatment, hygiene and diet.
- If necessary, ask for the instructions in writing.
- Ask whom you can contact if the need arises.
- Tell the staff if you do not understand the instructions for follow-up treatment.
- If you do not understand the medical terms, keep asking until you understand them.
- Tell the staff if you think you could have problems with carrying out your treatment or medication or with coping.
- Discuss the need for any assistive devices or alterations to your home.
- You will be provided with instructions and guidance on self-care.
- Ask for guidance if your treatment is transferred to another place, such as a health centre.

If necessary, you can get a plan for follow-up treatment and rehabilitation

The follow-up treatment and rehabilitation plan will address issues such as physical rehabilitation, adaptation training, career guidance, instruction on using assistive devices, psychosocial rehabilitation, and dietary advice. In addition, your working capacity and possibilities of returning to work are evaluated.

The rehabilitation plan will be drawn up by the public health care services in cooperation with you. Your doctor will draw up the plan together with a working group. This working group can include a physiotherapist, occupational therapist and social worker, among others. You can take a friend or relative with you to the planning session.

The rehabilitation plan may entitle you to reimbursement for the costs of getting, for example, support measures under the Disability Services Act, such as home alterations, transport services and personal assistance.

Take active part in the drawing up of your follow-up treatment plan – it will be drawn up in cooperation with you.

For the patient's friend or relative

How can you help to ensure that your friend or relative receives good and safe treatment?

Friends and relatives are an important source of support for patients, particularly when the patients are not able to play an active part in their own treatment. Cooperation between the health care staff and the patient's friends or relatives is particularly important when the patient is a child or an elderly person with a memory disorder.

You can be of great help in ensuring that your friend or relative receives safe treatment.

Engage in active dialogue with the health care staff and tell them what you think of the patient's situation and the success of the treatment.



Ask for the patient's consent

Check with your friend or relative that he or she wants you to be informed about his or her illness. The health care staff usually need the consent of the patient before they can tell you about the patient's state of health.

In most cases, the guardians of a child have the right to be informed of the child's health. However, if the child is mature enough to make decisions on his or her own health, the health care staff will need the consent of the child before they can share the child's health information with anyone, including the child's guardian. A doctor or other professional will assess the patient's level of maturity. A child's guardian does not have the right to refuse treatment necessary to saving the child's life or health.

When your friend or relative is unable to participate in treatment planning

Check that the doctors and nurses have been informed of any medicine the patient has been taking regularly before arriving for treatment. Also inform them of any non-prescription medicines, vitamins and herbal medicines the patient has been using. If the patient is using several medicines at the same time, ask the doctor for an overall assessment of the medication. The appropriateness of the medication of elderly patients

on multi-drug regimens should be evaluated at least once a year. Inform the doctor or nurse of any allergies and other illnesses your friend or relative has.

Be of assistance

If needed, request an opportunity to discuss the patient's treatment with the doctor.

If your friend's or relative's ability to function or communicate has been affected by a memory disorder, for example, inform the health care staff of the best way to speak and interact with the patient.

Make sure that the staff have your contact information. It would be easiest for the health care staff if one of the patient's relatives or friends would act as a contact person between them and the staff.

Avoid spreading diseases

Wash your hands carefully with soap and water before and after visiting the hospital. Use the hand sanitiser before and after touching the patient. If you are aware that you are vulnerable to catching diseases, such as influenza, avoid visiting the hospital.

Ensure the success of follow-up treatment

When your friend's or relative's treatment ends, check which medicines he or she should use in the future, how his or her follow-up treatment will be arranged, and whom you should contact if problems occur.

If necessary, put the patient's medicines into a pill organiser. Some pharmacies will, on request, dispense the medicines into pill pouches. You understand the needs of your friend or relative better than the health care staff – your help is critical in evaluating the effect and suitability of medicines.

Report any changes you observe in the patient's condition – you know him or her better than the health care staff.

Confirm your willingness to be an organ donor

Previously, if a deceased person did not have an organ donor card, permission for organ donation had to be sought from his or her next of kin. Nowadays, the assumption is made that a deceased person suitable for an organ transplant has given his or her consent for this, unless he or she is known to have imposed a life-long ban on such a procedure. Before beginning an organ transplant, the doctor must find out the deceased person's wishes, in so far as possible. For example, if the deceased does not have an organ donor card, his or her next of kin will be asked about the deceased person's opinion on the issue. If no certainty can be gained on this within the time available, the organ transplant can be performed.

Finland has a shortage of organs suitable for transplants. The change in legislation is intended to increase the number of organ transplants. There is no single, officially correct way to express one's willingness to donate organs. The key is that people are aware of your decision. For example, you can record your willingness to donate organs based on the following model. If your wishes on the matter cannot be ascertained, it will be assumed that you consent to organ donation.

Keep this paper with you and inform your relatives about it.

YES

I wish to donate my organs and tissue for transplant after my death.

Date:

Name:

Tell your relatives about your decision.

NO

I do not wish to donate my organs and tissue for transplant after my death.

Date:

Name:

Tell your relatives about your decision.

Personal details

Patient's details

Name: _____

Social security number: _____

Address: _____

Telephone number: _____

E-mail: _____

Contact details of next of kin/friend or relative

Name: _____

Telephone number: _____

☐ Information on my state of health and illness can be given to my next of kin/friend or relative

Allergies (allergies to medicine, food and other substances, and hypersensitivities):

Assistive devices, if any

Do you receive home help or home nursing?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Health care staff

The doctor treating you and his/her contact details:

Other health care professionals involved in your treatment:

Medication list

Long-term medication:

Name of medicine	Strength	Dosage	For what illness or condition?

Occasional medication:

Name of medicine	Strength	Dosage	For what illness or condition?

Non-prescription medicines:

Name of medicine	Strength	Dosage	For what illness or condition?

Vitamines:

Dietary supplements:
