CHECKLIST FOR GETTING THE RIGHT DIAGNOSIS

Adapted from the National Patient Safety Foundation and the Society to Improve Diagnosis in Medicine*

Tell Your Story Well: Be clear, complete, and accurate when you tell your clinician about your illness.

- *Be Clear*–Take some time to think about when your symptoms started, what made your symptoms better or worse, or if your symptoms were related to taking medications, eating a meal, exercising, or a certain time of day.
- *Be Complete*–Try to remember all of the important information about your illness. Write down some notes and bring them with you. A family member may be able to help you with this.
- *Be Accurate*–Sometimes you may see multiple clinicians during a medical appointment. Make sure your clinicians hear the same story regarding your illness.

Be a Good Historian
- Remember what treatments you have tried in the past, if they helped, and what, if any, side effects you experienced.
- Think about how your illness has progressed over time.
- Think about your family's medical history and if you may be at risk for similar illnesses.

Keep Good Records
- Keep your own records of test results, referrals, and hospital admissions.
- Keep an accurate list of your medications.
- Bring your medication list with you when you see your clinician or pharmacist.

Be an Informed Consumer
- Learn about your illness by looking at reliable sources on the Internet or visit a local library.
- Learn about the tests or procedures you are having done.
- Learn about your medications:
  - Know the names of your medications (both generic and brand names). For example: Tylenol (brand name) and acetaminophen (generic name)
  - Know what the medication is for
  - Know the amount (dose) you need to take
  - Know the time(s) you need to take it during the day
  - Know the side effects to watch for and report to your clinician
  - Know if the medication interacts with any food or drugs

Take Charge of Managing Your Health
- When meeting with your clinician, use the Ask Me 3 brochure, *Good Questions for Getting the Right Diagnosis:*
  1. What could be causing my problem?
  2. What else could it be?
  3. When will I get my test results, and what should I do to follow up?
- If you have more than one clinician, make sure each clinician knows what the other person is thinking and planning.
- Make sure each clinician knows all of your test results, medications, or other treatments.
- Be informed and involved in decisions about your health.

Know Your Test Results
- Make sure both you and your clinician get the results from any tests that are done.
- Don't assume that no news is good news; call and check on your test results.
- Ask what the test results mean and what needs to be done next.

Follow Up
- Ask when you need to make another appointment (follow up) with your clinician once you start treatment.
- Ask what to expect from the treatment or what it will do for you.
- Ask what you need to do if you get new symptoms or start to feel worse.

Make Sure It Is the Right Diagnosis
- Sometimes your diagnosis is the most "likely" thing that is wrong, but it may not be the "right" diagnosis.
- Don't be afraid to ask "What else could this be?"
- Encourage your clinicians to think about other possible reasons for your illness.

Record Your Health Information and Monitor Your Progress
- Track your health information and share it with your health care team in a structured format.[a]

[a] One available resource is SIDM's patient toolkit.

*These checklists do not necessarily reflect committee consensus or the views of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine but rather represent examples of ways that health care professionals and organizations can provide patients with opportunities to learn about the diagnostic process and become more actively involved in their health care.