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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services  
BC Patient Safety and Quality Council

### **‘IT’S GOOD TO ASK’ PROGRAM PROMOTES PATIENT SAFETY**

VICTORIA – Canadian Patient Safety Week kicks off across the country this week, from Nov. 2 to 6, and to raise awareness here in British Columbia, patients are being told that ‘It’s Good to Ask’ questions of their health-care providers.

“Patient Safety Week is a great opportunity to promote effective communication between patients and their doctors and other health providers,” said Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon. “It’s important that we each take control of our own health by educating ourselves and asking questions when we don’t understand.”

Sixty per cent of adult Canadians have low health literacy, which means that they do not have the skills to access and understand health information such as prescription medication use, infection prevention, and health care directions. Some people also refrain from asking the necessary questions of their health-care provider because of fear, shame or embarrassment.

The ‘It’s Good to Ask’ program, led by the B.C. Patient Safety and Quality Council (BCPSQC), encourages patients and family members to ask three key questions of their health-care providers:

- What is my health problem?
- What do we need to do?
- Why do we need to do this?

In support of Patient Safety Week and the ‘It’s Good to Ask’ program, the BCPSQC is providing tools for patients and family members on their website, [www.bcpsqc.ca](http://www.bcpsqc.ca). These include a worksheet, a medication card and an information sheet. All materials can be downloaded by patients, and are available in English, French, Chinese and Punjabi, with more languages to be added in the future.

“We wanted to develop tools that would help empower patients and their families to become involved in their own health and well being,” said Ed Kry, chair of the BCPSQC’s Patient and Public Engagement Working Group, which includes health professionals and members of the public and worked with the BCPSQC to develop the materials.

“We know that good healthcare starts with good communication,” said BCPSQC chair Dr. Doug Cochrane. “The ‘It’s Good to Ask’ program provides tools that will help to improve the conversations between patients, families and their caregivers, and we hope that we will be able to reduce the number of preventable injuries caused by miscommunication.”

The BCPSQC provides advice and recommendations to the Ministry of Health Services on matters related to patient safety and the quality of health care in B.C. It was established to enhance patient safety, prevent the occurrence of adverse events, promote transparency and accountability, and identify best practices to improve patient care.

In addition, last year the Province established the Patient Care Quality Review Boards to provide a clear, consistent, timely and transparent patient complaints process to review complaints that remain unresolved at the local and health authority level. The Province has also invested more than \$2.3 million to support the implementation of the Patient Safety Learning System – the first of its kind in Canada.

There are several initiatives being undertaken across the province to help educate members of the public and health care providers on improving communication. Examples include:

- Providence Health Care is holding a series of patient/resident/family focus groups that will discuss supports and barriers to effective communication and develop an action plan for improving communication in the future.
- Facilities across various health authorities have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, a process of medication reconciliation, which helps to ensure patients take the right medication during their hospital stay. The process involves a partnership between the patient, their physicians, nurses and pharmacists and includes an interview at the time of admission, combined with a current and accurate list of all medications the patient is taking on a regular basis at home.
- The Bedside Observer program at BC Children’s Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, seeks observations from parents about perceived lapses in the quality of care their child is receiving that augment current reporting systems. Listening to the observations and seeking the advice of parents begins a conversation that provides hospital staff with yet another opportunity to focus on preventing errors and improving services to patients.

Canadian Patient Safety Week was launched five years ago by the Canadian Patient Safety Institute, to raise awareness of patient safety issues in Canada. This year, the national theme is ‘Ask. Listen. Talk’.

For more information on Canadian Patient Safety Week, visit [www.asklistentalk.ca](http://www.asklistentalk.ca).

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