

# SpeakUP™

What you should  
know about  
memory problems  
and dementia

The Joint Commission is the largest health care

### When should you be concerned about memory problems?

When memory problems interfere with your daily life, you should seek help. Talk to a doctor if you've had repeated problems with:

- Knowing what day or season it is
- Remembering the name of a close family member or friend
- Getting lost in a familiar location
- Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps to find them
- Managing your money
- People mentioning that you are more forgetful

### What causes memory problems?

Memory problems can be caused by many things. Some can be reversed if you get treatment soon enough. That is why it is important to see a doctor if you are having problems. Causes include:

- Certain medicines
- Stress, anxiety or depression
- Urinary tract or other infections
- Thyroid, kidney or liver problems
- Low levels of vitamin B-12
- Serious lack of food or water
- Head injury
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Stroke
- Some brain diseases
- Acute and chronic illnesses

### Should a family member or friend go with you to the doctor?

Yes! You should ask a trusted family member or friend to go with you to your doctor's visit. They can be your advocate. Your advocate can help you ask questions, take notes, describe symptoms, and remember instructions. They can give the doctor an idea of how you are doing at home. Your advocate is there to support you. You are the center of the conversation.

### What will your doctor do?

Your doctor will give you a physical exam, may order tests, or refer you to another health care professional. The doctor may ask:

- What memory problems are you having?
- How often and when do you have them?
- What are your current and past medical conditions?
- What medicines are you taking? Include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and supplements.
- Has your health, memory or mood changed? How?
- Is there a family history of dementia? What about Huntington's or Parkinson's disease?

### What should you or your advocate ask the doctor?

There will be a lot to talk about with your doctor, so be prepared. Write down your symptoms. Include examples of your memory problems. Make a list of recent life changes or major stressors. Ask:

- What might be causing your symptoms? Could it be medicines or other conditions?
- What tests will be needed?
- Should you see a specialist?

## Dementia

Dementia is a decline or worsening of thinking, memory and reasoning skills. Dementia interferes with a person's daily life and activities. Sometimes there will be personality changes