

EMPOWERED PATIENT®

“Ten Things Patients Should Know” Series

WARNING SIGNS OF A RAPIDLY DECLINING PATIENT

1. **BODY TEMPERATURE** is too high or too low. Report temperatures below 96.8° F or above 100.4° F.
2. **HEART RATE** (pulse) or **RESPIRATORY RATE** (breathing) changes. A heart rate that stays less than 60 or greater than 100 beats per minute or a respiratory rate of less than 15 or greater than 20 breaths per minute may need to be evaluated.
3. **BLOOD PRESSURE** numbers are out of the normal range. If the systolic (top number in the blood pressure reading) is less than 90 or greater than 180 mmHg ask for an assessment.
4. **CHANGES IN MENTAL STATE** including confusion, delirium or an acute change in personality, memory or alertness.
5. **CHANGES IN URINE OUTPUT OR APPEARANCE.** A decrease in amount of urine is a concern (less than 50 cc over 4 hours), as is urine that appears darker in color or looks “concentrated.”
6. **THE PATIENT STATES** that something is wrong with them. Patients often have a sense that they are experiencing a sudden decline in their health.
7. **THE PATIENT DOESN'T LOOK RIGHT** to the family or advocate. Someone who knows the patient personally is often a better judge of a change in normal appearance or behavior.
8. **SHORTNESS OF BREATH** or having a tight feeling or discomfort in the chest. Shortness of breath can be a sign of heart attack, pulmonary embolism (blood clot), infection or pneumonia.
9. **ACUTE PAIN**, especially in the abdomen. This could be a sign of an infection (including peritonitis), intestinal obstruction, a perforated ulcer and other potentially life- threatening problems.
10. **VERY PALE** appearance of the skin or breaking out in cold sweats. These symptoms could indicate internal bleeding, shock, infection or heart attack.