

Policy experts outline ways to accelerate the adoption of decision aids.

Overview

This policy paper describes the progress to date with creating an infrastructure supportive of informed decision-making and highlights the changes necessary for a shift to recognizing informed patient choice as the standard of care.

Background

The ideal treatment choice for preference-sensitive conditions depends on patient values and preferences: specifically, how patients weigh harms versus benefits. Decision quality with standard counseling by providers has been shown to be inadequate. Decision aids, which present balanced information about treatment options in sufficient detail for patients to make an informed decision about the value of the various options, have been shown to improve decision quality but are not yet widely used.

Objective

To describe the current state of the infrastructure required to support informed decision making and to outline the policy changes required to ensure more widespread adoption of decision aids for preference-sensitive care.

Previously known about the topic:

- Decision aids have been shown to improve decision quality but are not yet widely used.

Contribution of this study:

- The authors propose that new policies focusing on informed consent, a redefinition of medical necessity, and new strategies for health care payment could stimulate greater recognition of informed patient choice as the standard of care.

Implementation of Infrastructure Supportive of Informed Patient Choice

According to the authors, major progress has been made in the past decade in researching and developing the infrastructure necessary for decision-making.

- Research has demonstrated the efficacy of decision aids in improving decision quality. Use of decision aids is associated with:
 - Increased knowledge
 - More realistic perceptions of the chances of harm and benefit
 - Decreased decisional conflict
 - Fewer patients who are passive in decision-making
 - Fewer patients who remain undecided after counseling
 - Improved concordance between a patient's values and a chosen treatment option
 - A 25 percent reduction in the number of patients who choose the more invasive of their treatment options
 - No adverse effects on patient satisfaction or health outcomes

- In addition to progress in scientific study, other evidence includes:
 - The infrastructure for building libraries of effective decision aids is growing.
 - Consensus standards for testing decision aids have been developed.
 - Several models have been developed for implementing decision support services.
 - National standards are under development to certify health care organizations that meet prescribed requirements for informed patient choice.
 - Measures to assess decision quality are under development.
 - New methods for evaluating preference-sensitive treatment are under way.

Opportunities for Accelerating Change

According to the authors, cultural, regulatory, legal, and economic barriers currently hinder the use of informed patient choice for treatment of preference-sensitive conditions. To overcome these barriers, the authors propose:

- Redefinition of the physician-patient relationship in the shared decision-making model.
- Development by experts in health policy of new standards for defining the medical necessity of the treatment options for preference-sensitive conditions.
- Implementation by health plans and employers of new payment structures that include incentives for participating in shared decision-making.
- Development by legal experts of a new standard of informed consent that includes shared decision-making.

The authors suggest that the use of decision aids should be made the default in the informed decision-making process, possibly through embedding the aids with electronic medical record systems. Model legislation supporting informed patient choice should be introduced at the national level. Payer groups should be convened to redefine the patient's role in the determination of medical necessity and claims review. The authors believe that new policies that focus on informed consent, a redefinition of medical necessity, and new strategies for health care payment will stimulate greater recognition of informed patient choice as the standard of care.

Key Implications

- Evidence exists that progress has been made in developing the infrastructure necessary to allow for more widespread use of shared decision-making.
- The authors propose that new policies that focus on informed consent, a redefinition of medical necessity, and new strategies for health care payment could stimulate greater uptake of informed patient choice as the recognized standard of care. ■

Full citation:

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