

NBCH action brief

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Shared Decision Making

Shared decision making means patients and providers collectively making health care decisions that are

- ▶ informed by evidence-based options,
- ▶ weighed by potential benefits and risks, and
- ▶ considerate of the overall preferences of the patient.

Particularly important when multiple treatment options exist without a clear “best” option, shared decision making relies heavily on decision aids—tools designed to engage patients in the decision making process and ensure that options are clear and guidance is balanced.¹ This Action Brief outlines shared decision making and how health plans are supporting the strategy based on data from eValue8™—a resource used by purchasers to track health plan performance. Lastly, the brief offers resources, tools, and actions employers can take to further support their employees and dependents in the shared decision making process.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

GREATER CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING LEADS TO LOWER DEMAND FOR UNNECESSARY HEALTH CARE RESOURCES²—AN IMPORTANT FACT TO CONSIDER WHEN ABOUT ONE-THIRD OR MORE OF ALL HEALTH CARE EXPENDITURES ARE DUE TO UNNECESSARY SERVICES AND INEFFICIENT CARE.³

Although today's patients are far more informed than they were 20 or 30 years ago, many remain distanced from decisions about their own health care, relying solely on the preferences of the practicing physician. The good news: there is considerable evidence that patients, armed with good information and the opportunity, can and will participate more actively in health care decisions and treatment options.⁴

WHY SHOULD EMPLOYERS CARE?

- ▶ Shared decision making is vital to helping employees become smarter health care consumers, particularly when the insurance design shifts responsibility to consumers, such as consumer-directed health plans.
- ▶ Employees who make more informed health care decisions may be more likely to seek recommended care, which can lead to improved health outcomes and lower employer costs above the deductible.
- ▶ Patients empowered to make health care decisions that better reflect personal preferences often experience more favorable health outcomes such as improved patient satisfaction, quicker recovery times, and increased compliance with treatment regimens.⁵

MEASURING UP

EVALUE8 RESULTS FROM 2011 SHOW THAT PLANS DO PROVIDE SUPPORT, YET CUSTOMIZATION, COST INFORMATION, AND PHYSICIAN SUPPORT CAN BE IMPROVED.

- ▶ 96% of plans provide members with access to treatment choice support products. The most commonly provided tools are Healthwise Decision Points (85% of all plans) and WebMD (55% of all plans). 65% of plans offer online treatment support as a buy-up and 75% offer telephonic treatment support as a buy-up.
- ▶ Among plans that offer treatment support products, all offer basic information such as descriptions of treatments, decision factors, and benefits and risks.
- ▶ The customization of that support varies widely, however. Only 39% allow customization based on the member's demographic attributes, and 83% provide information that is tailored to the member's progression of the condition.
- ▶ Cost information needs improvement. While all plans have tools providing some information on costs, only 41% offer cost calculators that are based on the plan's fee schedule and the selection of specific providers; 80% offer calculators that are based on paid charges in the local market; and 75% offer calculators that are linked to the member's specific benefit coverage to reflect out of pocket costs.
- ▶ Nearly all plans do well in identifying members who may benefit from the use of treatment support decision tools. All plans identify members through care or case manager support; 95% do so through nurse advice line referral; 93%

WHAT'S THE ISSUE? CONTINUED

- ▶ Shared decision making helps ensure that evidence-based best practices are not only considered, but likely implemented. Subsequently, the best results align with the best value for every health care dollar spent.⁶
- ▶ In fact, it has been estimated that if put into widespread use, shared decision making has the potential to trim hundreds of billions of dollars from the nation's health care bill.⁷

Purchasers expect plans to provide well-researched and objective resources to support members in making treatment decisions. Plans are encouraged to incorporate benefit coverage and plan/network-specific cost information. Purchasers also expect plans to promote and evaluate use of their treatment option support services.

—eValue8 Request for Information, 2012

MEASURING UP CONTINUED

- through health assessments; and 94% through claims or clinical record profiling.
- ▶ Physicians are left out of the picture. Only half of plans (51%) provide physicians with services to help engage patients in treatment support decision; even fewer (41%) provide physicians with point of service physician support such as reminders targeting patients considering specific therapies and patient communication aids such as tear-off treatment tool referrals; and only one-fourth of plans (27%) provide routine reporting to physicians that identifies patients as potential candidates.
 - ▶ Nonetheless, nearly all plans (99%) make specialty physician data available to primary care doctors, and 66% make the information available by placing it in a prominent place on the physician portal. Almost all plans (97%) report and promote hospital information to physicians, and again 85% make this information available by putting it in a prominent place on the physician portal.

TAKE ACTION

Action Item #1: Engage and educate your employee and dependent population

The first step in shared decision making is to ensure that patients are informed about their medical condition. There are many consumer resources you can make available to your employee and dependent population to help empower their shared decision making journey. Guide your employees and their families to reputable, evidence-based tools that are written for a general consumer audience and often available in other languages as well. Such tools include:

- ▶ [Choosing Wisely—ABIM Foundation](#)
- ▶ [Patient Resources—Dartmouth-Hitchcock's Center for Shared Decision Making](#)
- ▶ [Patient Decision Aids & Treatment Options—Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's Effective Health Care Program](#)
- ▶ [Patient Decision Aids—Informed Medical Decisions Foundation](#)
- ▶ [The Communication Toolkit—National Business Group on Health](#)

Action Item #2: Hold your health plan accountable

Require your health plan, especially when there is a consumer-directed health plan option, to provide well-researched, evaluated, and objective resources to your employees and dependents, supporting their treatment option decisions. Partner with your plan to develop benefit design incentives for patients and providers that encourage the use of decision aids, and publicly advocate for payment reform, requiring your plan to reimburse for shared decision making practices and the use of decision tools.

Action Item #3: Join your local business health care coalition

The [coalition movement](#) is a proven vehicle for meaningful change at the local level. Coalitions leverage the voice and power of their employer purchaser members by serving as community leaders working to advance change. Coalitions can support your efforts to educate your employee population about shared decision making tools, engage providers in your community about training and decision aids, and challenge your plans to better support and reimburse providers for their shared decision making efforts.

ENDNOTES

- 1 [Suarez-Almazor, M. "Using Decision Aids to Enhance Shared-Decision Making." Slide Presentation from the AHRQ 2009 Annual Conference. September 2009.](#)
- 2 <https://www.cahps.ahrq.gov/Quality-Improvement/Improvement-Guide/BrowseInterventions/Communication/Shared-Decision-Making.aspx>
- 3 [Carey, J. "Giving Patients the Data They Need." Bloomberg Businessweek. June 2009.](#)

- 4 <https://www.cahps.ahrq.gov/Quality-Improvement/Improvement-Guide/Browse-Interventions/Communication/Shared-Decision-Making.aspx>
- 5 [Ibid.](#)
- 6 [Culyba, M. "Shared Decision Making: How Two-Way Communication Improves the Doctor-Patient Relationship." Insights Health Care. UPMC Health Plan. June 2010.](#)
- 7 [Carey, J. "Giving Patients the Data They Need." Bloomberg Businessweek. June 2009.](#)

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