

How Useful Are Patient Decision Support Tools?

Holmes-Rovner M, Kroll J, Rovner DR, Schmitt N, Rothert M, Padonu G, Talarczyk G. Patient decision support intervention: increased consistency with decision analytic models. *Med Care* 1999;37:270-84.

Study Overview

Objective. To evaluate a patient decision support (PDS) intervention for perimenopausal hormone replacement therapy (HRT). PDS tools are intended to assist patients in using the medical evidence to make informed choices about health care that are consistent with their values [1].

Design. Randomized trial of 3 intensities of PDS: (1) low (brochure); (2) medium (lecture/discussion); and (3) high (active decision support). Although the intensity of the 3 interventions was varied, the content was standardized across all groups. Content focused on the physiology of menopause and self-care, the pros and cons of HRT, and communication with health care professionals. Women were encouraged to consider their values in making a decision about whether or not to take HRT and to recognize that their values may differ from those of others. They were assisted in assessing their personal risks and values using a Personal Risk Assessment form and a Problem Significance Assessment form.

Setting and participants. Participants were perimenopausal volunteers between the ages of 40 and 54 years ($n = 248$) living in a medium-sized midwestern United States university community.

Main outcome measures. Participants were evaluated as to whether their treatment-related decisions were "consistent with values" (correlation between expected utility and likelihood of taking hormones) and their likelihood to take HRT. Data were collected at baseline, immediately postintervention, and at 6 and 12 months postintervention.

Main results. Overall, the patients who received the brochure were less consistent with the decision analytic model than the lecture/discussion and active decision support groups. Although the PDS tools did increase the number of women certain about whether or not to take HRT, there were no differences in likelihood to take HRT among experimental groups. Of 99 women uncertain about HRT with estrogen alone before the intervention, 65% changed: 21 (32%) decided against estrogen replacement and 44 (69%) decided for it. More intensive

interventions produced modest gains in a normative direction.

Conclusion

PDS tools, whether in the form of brochures, lectures, or more active interventions, reduce patients' uncertainty and assist them in making informed decisions regarding medical treatment.

Commentary

The complex array of clinical and quality-of-life outcomes that may result from alternative medical therapies underscores the need for patient involvement in many types of clinical decision making [2-4]. Further, there is increased desire on the part of many patients to participate more actively in treatment decisions. Decision support tools can play an important role in providing patient education, assessing patient preferences, and facilitating shared decision making between patient and provider.

Applications for Clinical Practice

Most patients want information about their health state and treatment options, and many want to take an active role in decision making. Decision support tools can help address these concerns and help the patient become a more informed health care consumer. The clear and accurate presentation of the probability of outcomes also can contribute to realistic patient expectations about treatment.

References

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