

Choosing Wisely (for KINS PSA)

This is Dr. Mary Meengs, Medical Director of the Humboldt-Del Norte Foundation for Medical Care, with a Community Comment for KINS. Today I want to talk about something called Choosing Wisely.

Choosing Wisely is a campaign begun a couple years ago in order to help physicians and their patients have the important conversations needed to insure that the right care is delivered at the right time. The American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation worked with Consumer Reports, and other consumer groups, to develop this initiative. Choosing Wisely is focused on helping doctors and patients think and talk about medical tests and procedures that may be unnecessary, and in some cases can cause harm.

Over 50 different specialty medical societies, like the American College of Cardiology and the American Academy of Family Physicians have come up with lists of 5 tests or procedures which are commonly used, whose necessity should be questioned or discussed. The lists are meant to promote conversations which can help patients choose care that is supported by scientific evidence, not redundant, free from harm, and truly necessary. Another goal of Choosing Wisely is to help physicians be better stewards of finite health care resources.

Here are a couple examples from the Choosing Wisely lists. "Don't do imaging for low back pain within the first six weeks, unless red flags are present." Of course there could be specific symptoms or findings which would be alarming enough to justify getting x-rays or scans early, but these instances are not common. Extensive evidence shows that getting x-rays of the lower spine before six weeks does not improve outcomes. Unnecessary imaging leads to higher costs and the risk of false-positive results.

Another Choosing Wisely item says "Don't routinely prescribe antibiotics for acute mild-to-moderate sinusitis unless symptoms last for seven or more days, or symptoms worsen after initial clinical improvement." This guideline is based on the fact that most sinusitis is caused by a virus and will get better on its own. However, statistics show that antibiotics are prescribed in more than 80% of visits for sinusitis. This not only has a financial impact, but also exposes patients to possible side effects and can lead to development of antibiotic resistance.

Numerous patient-friendly guidelines, as well as the many "Lists of 5 things" can be found easily on the website, www.choosingwisely.org. These easy-to-read guidelines can be shared with your doctor. Well-informed patients and Shared Decision Making are key to getting the best health care.

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