

An update on shared decision making

ISSUE: The Commission has expressed interest in the use of shared decision-making to increase patient-centered care and reduce health care disparities.

KEY POINTS: Research suggests that Medicare beneficiaries have lower levels of health literacy than the general adult population. Yet they must make many significant choices about their health care including choosing among preference-sensitive treatment options. Some analysts have suggested that shared decision making, a process aimed at providing patients with objective information and eliciting their preferences about different options, can help beneficiaries arrive at a treatment decision with their physician that reflects both their individual values and an understanding of the clinical implications.

Since the Commission explored this issue in 2010, more providers, facilities, and health plans have implemented programs to facilitate shared decision-making. The increasing number of medical homes and accountable care organizations (ACOs) has encouraged further dissemination of SDM in medical practice. In addition, the proliferation of electronic health records (EHRs) over the past three years has made SDM programs more feasible.

We summarize recent developments in the field and examine demonstrations applying SDM within primary care. We also highlight efforts to use shared decision-making to reduce health care disparities.

ACTION: Commissioners should discuss strategies and future directions for this research.

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