

Six Steps of Shared Decision Making

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Introduction

Shared decision making is a collaborative process that allows patients and their providers to make health care treatment decisions together, taking into account the best scientific evidence available, as well as the patient's values and preferences. This process provides patients with the support they need to make the best individualized care decisions, while allowing providers to feel confident in the care they prescribe.

To assist providers in implementing shared decision making, we offer the six steps of shared decision making, along with some sample language that may be helpful in working with your patients to make better decisions together.

The Six Steps

1. Invite patient to participate

Often patients don't realize that there is more than one viable option for treatment. By offering an invitation, you are letting them know they have options and that their goals and concerns are an important part of the decision-making process.

Sample language:

"There's a decision to make about your treatment (or testing) and I'd like to make it with you. Knowing what's important to you will help us make a better decision."

OR

"Sometimes things in medicine aren't as clear as most people think. Let's work together so we can come up with the decision that's right for you."

2. Present options

Before making an informed decision, patients need to know all the options available to them.

Sample language:

When NOT using a decision aid:

"Here are some choices we can consider."

When using a decision aid:

"Did you have a chance to read or watch the material about your options? Which of the treatments (or tests) would you like to discuss?"

OR

"Here are your options."

"Let's take a few minutes to review the options you have."

3. Provide information on benefits and risk

Provide balanced information on benefits and risks. Use numbers rather than words when you can. Without them, patients tend to overestimate the benefits and underestimate the risk, and have less realistic expectations. It's also important to check in with patients to make sure they correctly understand the benefits and harms.



Sample language:

"Let's go over the benefits and the risks of the options you're considering."

To check for understanding:

"You've seen a lot of numbers which can be confusing. Do you have any questions? May I help you sort through them?"

OR

"I want to be sure that I've explained things well. Please tell me what you heard (or wrote down) about _____ (most important benefits and risks)."

4. Assist patient in evaluating options based on their goals and concerns

Patients may not be comfortable raising their personal goals and concerns for treatment. By actively inquiring, you are giving them permission to speak about what is important to them. Once you have elicited this information, you can assist them in evaluating their options based on their preferences.

Sample language:

"Just as people are different, no one decision is right for everyone. As you think about your options, what's important to you?"

OR

"People have different goals and concerns. As you think about your options, what's important to you? For example, some people...while other people..."

5. Facilitate deliberation and decision making

Patients may not be ready to make a decision immediately. Probing for what else they need to know or do before making the decision can be helpful. If they are ready to decide, you can help facilitate a final decision.

Sample language:

"Considering what we've discussed, do you have a preference about the direction we take?"

"You have time to think things over."

"Do you want to think about this decision with anyone else, someone who might be affected by the decision, someone who might help you sort things out?"

"Is there any more information you need?"

"What's the hardest part about deciding?"

"From what I hear you saying, here's what I'd suggest...how does that sound to you?"

6. Assist with implementation

Close the conversation by laying out the next steps for the patient.

Sample language:

"Let's take a moment to talk about next steps."

