

# Shared Decision Making in Healthcare: Empowering Patients Through Collaborative Choices



## Highlights

Shared decision making in healthcare is a process where a patient and a healthcare professional collaborate to make important medical decisions. This ensures that patients are actively involved in choices concerning their health and treatment.

Healthcare decisions can range from choosing whether to undergo a medical test to selecting among treatment options. Examples include:

- Deciding whether to undergo a particular diagnostic test
- Choosing between different treatment options
- Opting for a procedure or adopting a wait-and-see approach
- Selecting a preferred model of pregnancy care
- Deciding on a vaginal or cesarean birth
- Choosing antenatal tests

In shared decision making, healthcare professionals provide information about the benefits and risks of different options, while patients contribute their values, goals, and personal circumstances to make the most appropriate choice.

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## **The Importance of Shared Decision Making**

### **Ethical Considerations**

Shared decision making ensures that patients are actively involved in decisions affecting their health. It is an ethical approach that respects individual autonomy and personal values.

### **Aligning with Patient Values and Preferences**

When patients participate in discussions about their healthcare, they can express what matters most to them. This allows them to choose options that align with their values, cultural beliefs, and lifestyle.

This is particularly crucial when medical evidence does not indicate a clear superior choice. Patients may also rule out options based on personal factors such as accessibility and financial constraints.

### **Enhancing Knowledge and Understanding**

During shared decision making, healthcare providers explain the available options, including potential risks and benefits. Understanding these factors enables patients to make well-informed choices and set realistic expectations for their treatment.

In some cases, shared decision making can lead to less invasive approaches, reducing unnecessary procedures and associated costs.

## **What to Expect from Your Healthcare Team**

Patients have the right to expect their healthcare team to:

Treat them with respect

Involve them in medical decisions

Provide clear information about medical conditions, tests, and treatment options

Offer assistance in understanding complex medical information

Encourage questions and provide comprehensive answers

Healthcare professionals may use decision aids—paper-based or online tools—to help explain options and guide patients in evaluating their choices. These resources can be particularly useful in clarifying complex decisions.

## **Disagreeing with Your Healthcare Team**

Patients have the right to make healthcare decisions without external pressure. If a patient disagrees with a recommended test or treatment, healthcare professionals must respect their choice. They will continue providing care, regardless of the decision made.

To ensure patients make informed decisions, healthcare professionals may:

Clarify the reasoning behind their recommendation

Explain potential risks of declining treatment

Discuss alternative options

Document the patient's decision in their medical record

## **Getting a Second Opinion**

Patients have the right to seek a second opinion regarding their medical condition or treatment plan. Consulting another healthcare professional can provide additional perspectives and help patients make more confident decisions about their care.

## **Raising Concerns About Your Care**

If a patient is unsatisfied with their healthcare experience, they can speak to:

Their doctor or healthcare provider  
A local health complaints agency or regulatory body  
A professional organization overseeing healthcare practitioners

Patients who are uncertain about a medical event-especially concerning labor, birth, or emergencies-may request a debrief session with their doctor or healthcare provider. This allows them to ask questions and gain a better understanding of their experience.

## **Tools and Assistance**

Patients may find the following questions helpful when discussing medical decisions with their doctor or healthcare provider:

What are my choices? \ (One option is always to wait and monitor the situation.)  
What are the potential benefits and risks of each option?  
How likely is each benefit or risk to occur in my situation?

Additional support can include:

Decision-making worksheets to help weigh pros and cons  
Journaling tools to reflect on values and preferences  
Audio recordings or note-taking during appointments to review later  
Patient advocacy services for navigating complex decisions  
Emotional support services like counseling to reduce stress and anxiety