

Physician Colorectal Cancer Screening Recommendations: An Examination Based on Informed Decision Making

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Purpose: The purpose of this research was to examine the content of physicians' colorectal cancer screening recommendations. More specifically, using the framework of informed decision making synthesized by Braddock and colleagues, we conducted a qualitative study of the content of recommendations to describe how physicians are currently presenting this information to patients.

Methods: We conducted semi-structured interviews with 65 primary care physicians. We analyzed responses to a question designed to elicit how the physicians typically communicate their recommendation.

Findings: Almost all of the physicians (98.5%) addressed the "nature of decision" element. A majority of physicians discussed "uncertainties associated with the decision" (67.7%). Fewer physicians covered "the patient's role in decision making" (33.8%), "risks and benefits" (16.9%), "alternatives" (10.8%), "assessment of patient understanding" (6.2%), or "exploration of patient's preferences" (1.5%).

Conclusions: We propose that the content of the colorectal screening recommendation is a critical determinant to whether a patient undergoes screening. Our examination of physician recommendations yielded mixed results, and the deficiencies identified opportunities for improvement. We suggest primary care physicians clarify that screening is meant for those who are asymptomatic, present tangible and intangible benefits and risks, as well as make a primary recommendation, and, if needed, a "compromise" recommendation, in order to increase screening utilization.

Citation:

Wackerbarth SB, Tarasenko YN, Joyce JM, Haist SA. (2007). Physician colorectal cancer screening recommendations: an examination based on informed decision making. *Patient Education and Counseling*; 66(1): 43-50.