

# Shared Decision Making



A cancer diagnosis can be scary. You may feel a whirlwind of emotions while you process the news. It is difficult to be a patient, hear medical language, adjust your life to medical appointments, treatment schedules and side effects. Having some direction can help ease some of the stress that comes with your diagnosis and it can be helpful to be involved in decision making.

Research shows that people want to be more involved in making decisions about their own health and health care than they currently are. People want to have more control over the way their care is planned and delivered.

## What is shared decision making?

Shared decision making is a partnership between health professionals and patients when there are a range of options available.

We are all unique, and no one option is right for everyone. Shared decision making allows patients to be as involved in making decisions about their care, treatment and management options as they would like to be.

People know what matters to them, what is right for their own circumstances, what their personal preferences and health goals are.

Health professionals have access to reliable, quality information and as part of the shared decision making process will advise on the possible benefits, harms and consequences of management options related to an illness.

By talking openly with their health professional, patients are empowered to make the best decision about treatment(s), management or support that is right for them.

This may include continuing with a current treatment, trying a new treatment or even the decision to have no treatment at all.

## What are the benefits of shared decision making?

Research shows that patients who are actively involved in shared decision making have a greater understanding of their illness and treatment options. They feel informed, have a voice, feel heard and are more in control.

Patients who input into their care plan are also more likely to continue with the agreed treatment as it is based on what matters to them.

Things to consider with shared decision making  
Before attending an appointment, patients should think about what matters to them so they can have a meaningful conversation about their care and treatment.

It can be a good idea to make a brief written note to take to an appointment and to also write down what specific questions you would like answered.

As a starting point, the following three questions will help to lead the conversation with the health professional:

- What are my choices?
- What is good and bad about each choice?
- What help do I need to make my decision?

Before making a decision there will be lots of things to consider and it can be helpful to write these down. Some examples are:

- My aims for care and treatment are..
- Side effects I'd like to avoid are..
- My feelings about medication are..
- I am likely / not likely to take prescribed medication..

- I would like more written information on..
- I would prefer to have information explained to me verbally..
- The people I'd like to be involved in my treatment are..
- This is how I'd like them to be involved..

A patient's family, friends or carers can be involved in discussions if they feel they need additional support to make a decision.

### Before leaving the appointment

Shared decision making is not just about making sure the patient is involved, but making sure the decision reached is a good one and is the right one for the patient. Before you leave:

- Make sure you feel satisfied that your questions were answered and that you have written down what you need to know.
- Make sure you know what will happen next.
- Ask for the name and number of someone you can contact in case you have further questions.
- Ensure you are booked in for your follow-up appointment.



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