



## Choosing Wisely – For Employers – Part 2

Presented by J. Paul Martin, MD

Chief Medical Officer

We learned in the previous newsletter that 30 percent of the U.S. healthcare budget is spent on unnecessary procedures. The “Choosing Wisely®” initiative has challenged us to critically evaluate whether medical testing and procedures are:

- Supported by evidence
- Not duplicative of other tests or procedures already received
- Free from harm
- Truly necessary

Many times patients arrive at their medical provider with preconceived notions of what is necessary: e.g. an MRI of their shoulder, a strep test, a prescription medication. Here are a few more recommendations by the American Academy of Family Physicians of “things that patients and physicians should question.” Using the above criteria, physicians are admonished:

- Don’t do imaging for low back pain within the first six weeks, unless red flags are present.
- Don’t routinely prescribe antibiotics for acute mild-to-moderate sinusitis unless symptoms last for seven or more days, or symptoms worsen after initial clinical improvement.
- Don’t screen for carotid artery stenosis (CAS) in asymptomatic adult patients. (Commonly done at churches/shopping malls by mobile units).
- Don’t routinely screen for prostate cancer using a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test or digital rectal exam. There is convincing evidence that PSA-based screening leads to substantial over-diagnosis of prostate tumors. Many tumors will not harm patients, while the risks of treatment are significant.
- Don’t use dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) screening for osteoporosis in women younger than 65 or men younger than 70 with no risk factors.

All of the listed procedures are unnecessary, unsupported by evidence or associated with harm – unless very specific risk factors are present. As healthcare delivery becomes increasingly performance-based, the mantra of “improving outcomes while eliminating waste” must be shared by employers, patients and providers.

A PDF containing all of the specialty society recommendations is available at:

<http://www.choosingwisely.org/doctor-patient-lists>

Encouraging your employees to engage in a brief discussion with their healthcare provider can improve outcomes while lowering costs for everyone. It’s time to insist on Choosing Wisely.