



Choosing Wisely – For Employers

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Medical economists estimate that 30 percent of our nation's annual \$2.6 trillion healthcare budget is spent on unnecessary procedures. That's \$750 billion a year in waste! In April of 2012 the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation unveiled its "Choosing Wisely®" initiative challenging medical and surgical specialty societies to begin discussions with patients to reduce unnecessary procedures and help eliminate waste.

Choosing Wisely® aims to promote conversations between physicians and patients by helping patients choose care that is:

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

Each specialty society submitted five tests or procedures commonly used in their respective fields, whose necessity should be questioned and discussed. The following are some of the ideas from the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine:

- Don't prescribe opiates for acute or chronic pain for workers in safety sensitive positions.
- Don't initially obtain X-rays for injured workers with acute nonspecific back pain.
- Don't order low back X-rays as part of a routine pre-placement medical examination.
- Don't routinely order sleep studies (polysomnogram) to screen for/diagnose sleep disorders in workers suffering from chronic fatigue/insomnia.

A patient may present at his doctor's office for pain medication so he can get back to work. Another presents expecting an MRI of the back because of being hurt at work and believing that Workers' Comp would pay for the study. A worn-out employee working secondary employment seeks referral to a sleep center because of chronic fatigue. In each situation an earnest discussion with the physician applying the above principles would help avoid waste and possible harm by "Choosing Wisely." We usually recognize ill-advised demands when we meet them, but not always when we make them. "Choosing Wisely" begins the conversation to eliminate unnecessary treatment and requires participation by both the patient and the care provider.

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 providers can improve outcomes while lowering costs for everyone. It's time to insist on "Choosing Wisely."