



Choosing Wisely – For Physicians

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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. See your specialty society recommendations: <http://www.choosingwisely.org/doctor-patient-lists>

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 field, whose necessity should be questioned and discussed. Some of the recommendations follow:

- No antibiotics should be given for pharyngitis in children unless the Strep Test is positive (American Academy of Pediatrics).
- Sinus infections should not be treated with antibiotics unless symptoms continue more than 7 days (Allergy, Family Practice).
- Absent "red flags", no imaging should be performed for nonspecific back pain for at least six weeks post injury (Family Practice, Internal Medicine, Occupational Medicine, and Spine Society).

A patient may present at his doctor's office for antibiotics because he feels he is "coming down with a sinus infection." 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 parent takes a cranky child with a sore throat to an urgent care center demanding a "Z Pak." 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 list of recommendations can be found at <http://www.choosingwisely.org/doctor-patient-lists>. Take a few minutes to review the lists of your specialty society to see common procedures and tests that have been shown to be wasteful. Engaging in a brief discussion with your patients can improve outcomes while lowering costs for everyone. It's time to insist on "Choosing Wisely."