

Patients with cancer can experience uncertainty when making treatment decisions. When unaddressed, patient uncertainty can result in decisional conflict and decisional regret. Providers can assist in decreasing these factors by involving patients in the decision-making process. Patients who agree to participate should be informed about their diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment options, including the benefits, the risks and harms, or the option of no treatment. Providers also can help patients to clarify their values, which reveal patient preferences and inform tailoring of care for each patient. When an informed patient's personal preferences align with care decisions, decisional quality is achieved.

**AT A GLANCE**

- Each patient needs to be carefully assessed to determine his or her desired level of participation in decision making and the amount of information wanted.
- Patients who are involved, informed, and clear on their personal values tend to achieve quality decisions.
- Obtaining decisional quality helps to decrease decisional conflict and future decisional regret.

**KEYWORDS**

shared decision making; decisional quality; decisional conflict

**DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER**

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# Reducing Patient Uncertainty

Implementation of a shared decision-making process enhances treatment quality and provider communication

Annika Gustafson, MHA, BSN, RN

Patient-centered care is a value held among all healthcare organizations. The Institute of Medicine (2001) highlighted the importance of patient-centered care in *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Healthcare System for the 21st Century*. However, alarming issues in health care persist, such as medically uninformed patients, which may be caused by lack of health literacy and numeracy, lack of information, lack of retention, or denial of disease. An ongoing effort has been made to improve care by ensuring that the patient is at the center of care, and this has been demonstrated through increasing the practice of shared decision making (SDM). SDM is a collaborative practice between the patient and provider in which they make medical decisions together for the patient, using the provider's expertise, the best scientific evidence available, and input from patients, such as their values, needs, and preferences.

Research on SDM in oncology has revealed promising evidence on effective communication and decision aids to bolster SDM (Levit, Balogh, Lighter, Nass, & Park, 2013). These aids help patients make quality decisions by improving patient knowledge, clarification of personal values, and patient-provider communication (Stacey et al., 2014). Cancer care's complexity can easily overwhelm patients faced with difficult decisions that may have serious consequences for their health and well-being. Caring for patients with cancer re-

quires an acute awareness of patient status and role flexibility (Tariman et al., 2016). Patients with cancer face unique aspects of decision making. Nurses must consider these aspects of decision making to support patients in their struggle with uncertainty.

**Decisional Conflict**

Internal conflict commonly comes from the element of uncertainty. Most people at one time or another are faced with making decisions in which they have incomplete information, such as deciding whether to marry somebody, buy a house, or accept a new job position. Patients with cancer experience uncertainty on a much more intense level than what many people face with the usual milestones of life. Many patients with cancer feel conflicted when trying to make a decision about treatment. This can result from not having enough information, support, or perhaps they feel unclear about their values and/or feel uncertain about which choice is best (Fiset et al., 2000). All of these factors contribute to indecision, making treatment choices difficult with the potential of causing patient distress and poor health outcomes. Nurses have a role in resolving decisional conflict by making sure that patients are assessed for decisional conflict and that patient concerns are uncovered through therapeutic communication. The Decisional Conflict Scale (DCS) is a valid and reliable tool for assessing decisional conflict (O'Connor, 1995). The DCS helps identify the potential causes of decisional conflict, such as lack of certainty, lack of information, lack of clarity