

## Health Matters – August 2010

### *Two Heads are Better than One: Shared Decision Making*

Have you ever been ‘driven crazy’ deciding which car to buy? We must choose a make and model, new or used, and various options. Then we have to negotiate a fair price, hoping we pick a cherry and avoid a lemon. Ads on television, the Internet and newspapers can be biased and only add to the confusion. Often this frustration can be eased by the recommendation of a trusted friend or by reading a current auto consumer book.

Many medical conditions require decisions on treatment, some more immediate and others not as urgent. These decisions are much more stressful than buying a car. Well-meaning friends and family may offer incomplete advice. Some Internet information can be bewildering and misleading. Books on the subject are often unclear and sometimes outdated. Your healthcare providers can be extremely helpful resources, but sometimes they may not fully explain all of your options.

Stillwater Medical Group has been working on better ways to help patients partner with providers in order to make the best choices. “Shared decision making” is a method of making treatment decisions as a team. Certain things help to make shared decision work well for patients:

- Good quality sources of information that describe patient options in a way that is easy to understand.
- A coordinated team of doctors and nurses who work together to help patients learn about their choices and support them throughout the process.
- Time to think through their choices.

According to Stillwater Medical Group urologist, Dr. Tom Stormont, “The shared decision making process for prostate cancer treatment helps my patients make quicker, more informed decisions with less stress. It has been extremely helpful.” The work of Stillwater Medical Group’s team was noted by the *Wall Street Journal* (Aug. 4, 2009) and was recognized by HealthPartners through an innovation award.

Stillwater Medical Group partners with other groups from around the country who are studying how to bring shared decision making to patients, including the Foundation for Informed Medical Decision Making, a non-profit based in Boston. Their goal is to make excellent support for decision making a reality for all patients. They bring together medical groups from across the country to study how to best support patients. Stillwater Medical Group is a leader towards this goal, serving on a local level through the Minnesota Shared Decision Making Collaborative.

Stillwater Medical Group currently offers shared decision making to patients with the following conditions:

- Depression - patients enroll in our DIAMOND (Depression Improvement Across Minnesota Offering A New Direction) program
- Breast cancer
- Prostate cancer
- Enlarged prostate

Shared decisions making will be offered to patients with the following conditions later this year:

- Uterine fibroids
- Acute and chronic back pain
- End of life care

“The shared decision making program is excellent,” commented one patient who experienced the shared decision making process. “I understand the various treatment options and potential complications much better now. Reviewing all the information and having discussions with a knowledgeable professional allowed me to formulate questions specific to my medical history. I feel much more prepared to make decisions about my health with my doctor.”

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