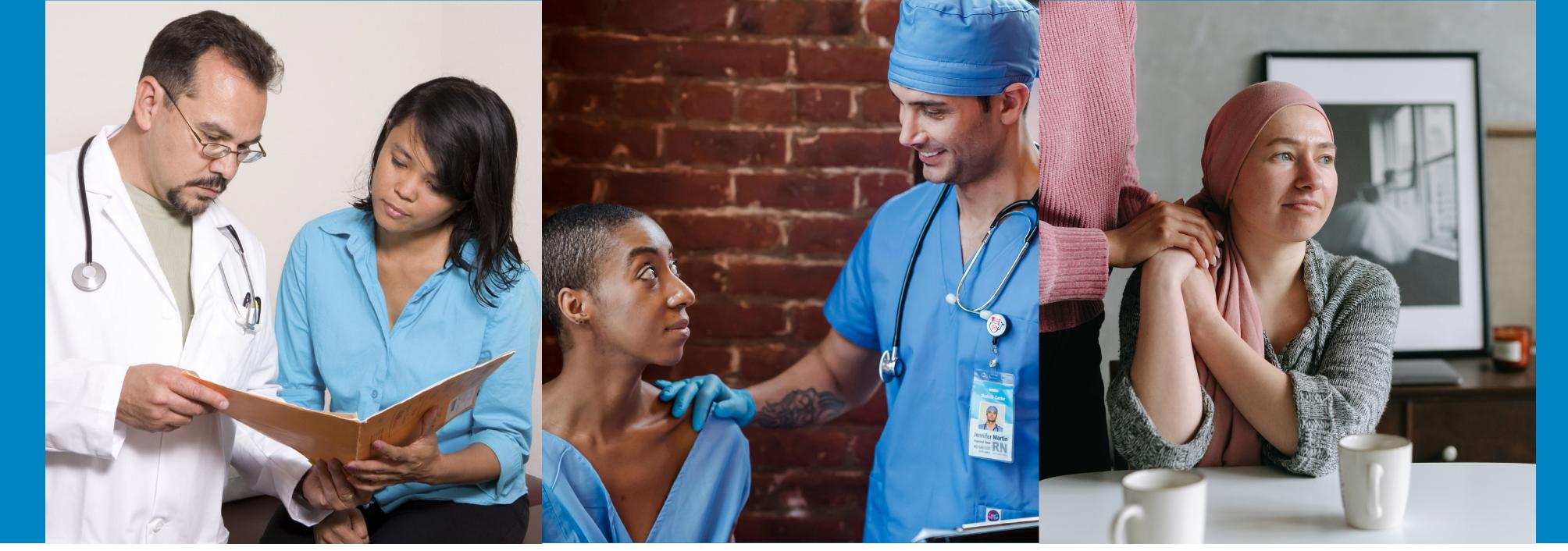


Shared Decision-Making: A Modern Technique to Better the Doctor-Patient Relationship

Dina Smith, LMSW, Oncology Social Worker/Caregiver Program Coordinator at CancerCare®



80 CANCERCATE A LEGACY OF HELP & HOP

Abstract

The Shared Decision-Making model is a reformed method of choosing a cancer treatment. It combines inclusivity, autonomy, education, and clear communication between a provider, a patient, and a caretaker. Oftentimes, providers will prescribe a treatment without having a thorough conversation with the patient about alternate treatment options, what to expect with the prescribed treatment, or how it may impact their lifestyle choices. Furthermore, caregiver abilities, needs, and expectations are oftentimes overlooked or ignored in the treatment decision-making process as well. Lack of dialogue between the patient, doctor, and caregiver can lead to feelings of isolation and unpreparedness for what a particular treatment entails. Shared Decision-Making ensures patients and caregivers can make well-informed decisions at a time when very little may seem within their control. With further education, oncology social workers can use the Shared Decision-Making model to better advocate for and empower their patients and caregivers.

Background: Does Doctor Know Best?

When someone is diagnosed with cancer, they are immediately faced with many difficult questions. Some of these questions include, but are not limited to:

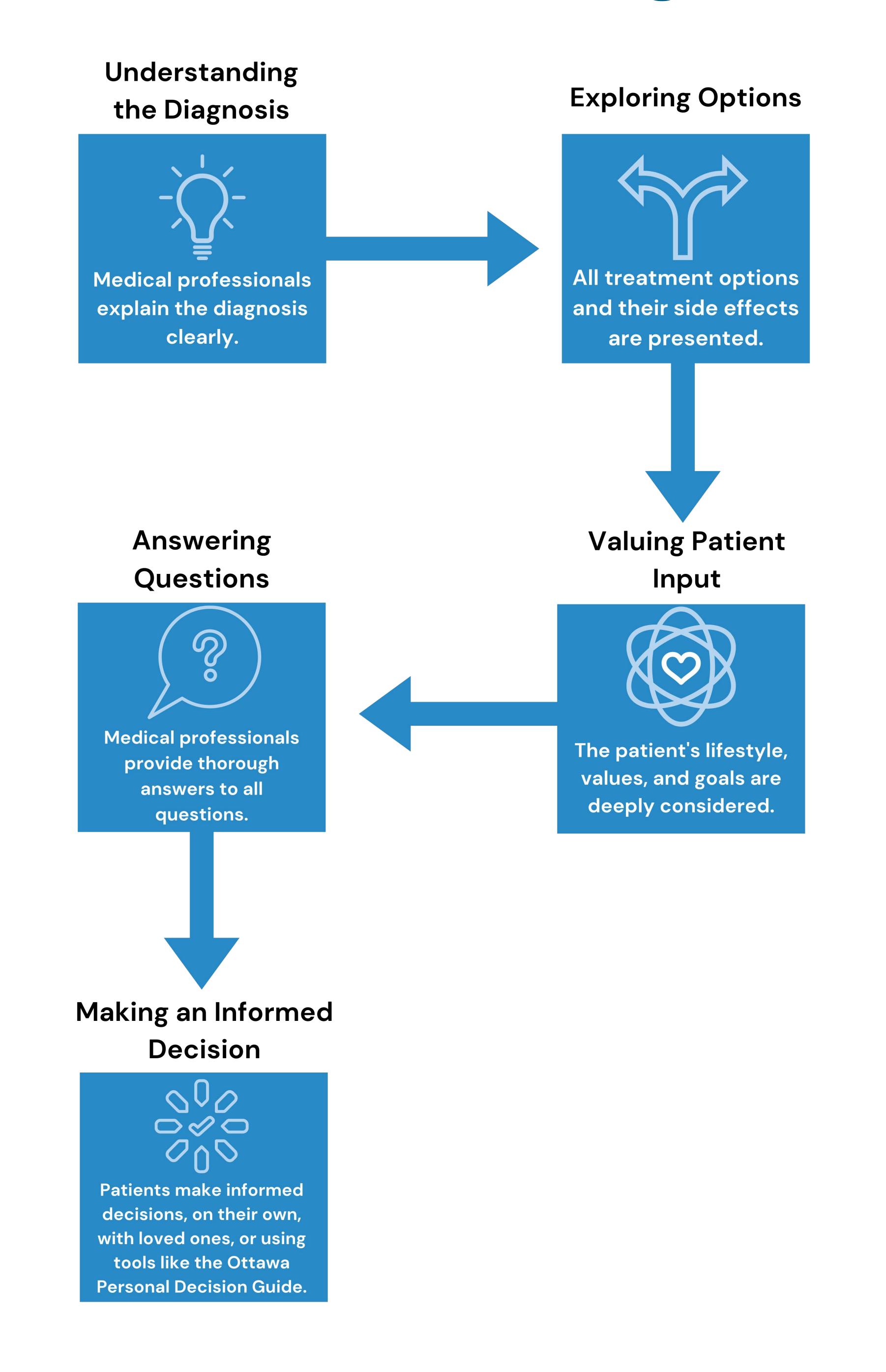
- What are my treatment options?
- What side effects will I face? How will these affect my lifestyle?
- How will my diagnosis affect my immediate family?
- How will this affect my future?

Even though these questions may be pressing, the patient-provider relationship has typically consisted of a one-sided dialogue between the provider and the patient. This can create a dynamic that makes it difficult for patients and caregivers to obtain needed information and ask questions to learn more about their diagnosis. The idea that "doctor knows best" has been normalized, meaning whatever information the medical team presents to the patient is the only relevant information for the patient to know.

Presentation Goals

- Educate oncology social workers unfamiliar with Shared Decision-Making about why this model is important for the doctor-patient relationship.
- Train oncology social workers to implement Shared Decision-Making in their own medical settings. Oncology social workers can guide patients by walking them through a personal decision guide or posing similar questions for them to consider.
- Guide oncology social workers in educating other medical team members about Shared Decision-Making. This will encourage doctors and nurses to communicate clearly with patients and caregivers about the treatment process and all possible side effects.

The Shared Decision-Making Model



Ottawa Decision-Making Guide

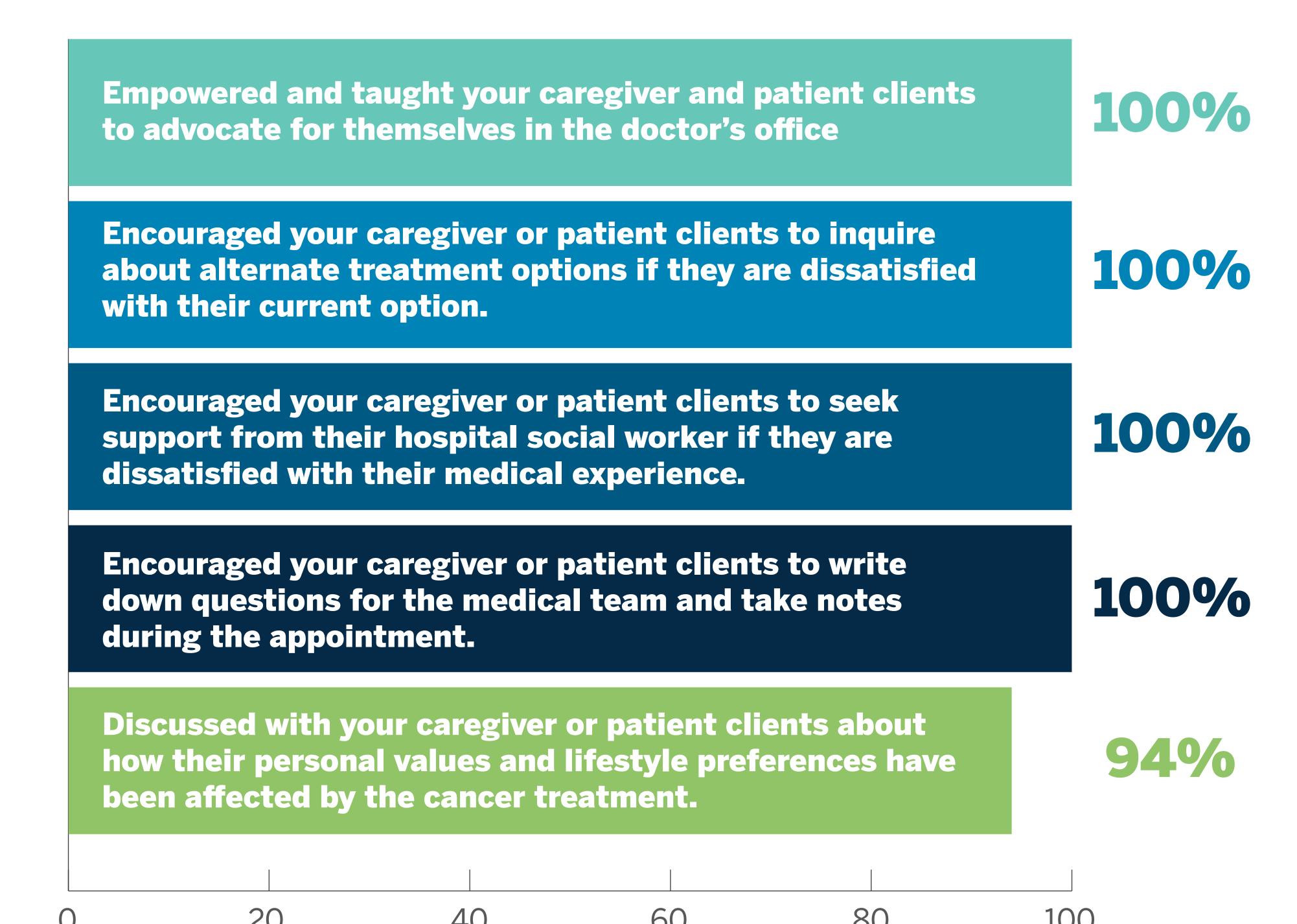


Oncology Social Worker Role

- Guidance on Decisions: Directs patient and caregivers through decision-making, aligning treatment with lifestyle and values.
- Values and Goals: Strengthens connections by exploring personal and cultural values, aligning treatment plans accordingly.
- Communication Aid: Helps articulate patient and caregiver preferences to entire healthcare team.
- Empowers Patients: Amplifies patient voices in treatment decisions, promoting autonomy and treatment adherence.
- Support System Strengthening: Bolsters patient support by engaging caregivers in the treatment discussion.
- Inclusivity and Trust: Contributes to safer environments for BIPOC populations and LGBTQ+ identifying individuals, whose needs and concerns are oftentimes overlooked in the medical field.

CancerCare Social Work Shared Decision-Making Knowledge

In situations where the patient or caregiver express dissatisfaction or concern, have you:



Feedback from Social Workers

"I worked with a client who needed stronger pain medication than her doctor had prescribed, and helped her self-advocate which thankfully made a big difference to her quality of life."

"I have assisted several clients in creating a list of questions to ask their oncologist/medical team when it came to their side effects surrounding treatment."

"I have a caregiver whose mother was immediately put on hospice after being diagnosed. And my client feels that he could use more support from her medical team/hospice facility. We talked about access to those supports, but also having a conversation with his mother about what her wishes/values/preferences are so they can go into conversations with her team and get the support that both she and her son are hoping for."

Conclusion

While Shared Decision-Making is an inclusive and equal approach to treatment decision-making, there is minimal and outdated information about how it could be utilized in oncology, particularly by oncology social workers. Oncology social workers could play an even more integral role by educating medical team members, patients, and caretakers about Shared Decision-Making and guiding patients and caregivers through the process with a decision-making tool. This type of education would promote further health equity within the medical facility by providing proper support to vulnerable populations (BIPOC, LGBTQ+) while respecting and valuing patient autonomy. This does not require a complete overhaul of existing patient-provider dynamics. Rather, it can include a clearer role of a social worker in harnessing patient autonomy and empowerment to create a more dynamic, communicative relationship between doctors, patients, and caregivers.

References

- . Apodaca, C., Bascom, E., Beneteau, E., Casanova-Perez, R., Hartzler, A., Lane, C., Mohanraj, D., Pratt, W., Sabin, J., Vidyarthi, D., &Weibel, N. (2021). Broken down by bias: Healthcare biases experienced by BIPOC and LGBTQ+ patients. AMIA Annual Symposium Proceedings, 275-284.
- 2. Bell, N., Dickinson, J., Grad, R., Kasperavicius, D., Kretschmer, K., Legare, F., Moore, A., & Singh, H. (2017). Shared decision making in preventive health care. Can Fam Physician, 63(9), 682-684. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5597010/
- 3. CancerCare. 2022. National research report on shared treatment decision-making. https://www.cancercare.org/cancer-caregivers
- 4. Grabinski, V., Lee, C., Myckatyn, T., Philpott-Streiff, S., & Politi, M. (2018). Importance of shared decision-making for vulnerable populations: Examples from postmastectomy breast reconstruction. Health Equity, 2(1), 234-238. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6167005/
- 5. Hübner, J., Josfeld, L., Keinki, C., Pammer, C., & Zomorodbakhsch, B. (2021). Cancer patients' perspectives on shared decision-making and decision aids in oncology. Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology, 147, 1725-1732.
- https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00432-021-03579-6#citeas
 O'Connor, A., Stacey, D., & Jacobsen, M (2015). Ottawa personal decision guide. Ottawa Hospital Research Institute & University of Ottawa, Canada. https://decisionaid.ohri.ca/docs/das/OPDG.pdf
- 7. Taylor, A. (2017, July 31). Shared decision making, it's no longer 'doctor knows best.' Medstar Health. https://www.medstarhealth.org/blog/shared-decision-making