



Evidence Based Medicine – Patient Centered Based Medicine

Among healthcare providers there is a great deal of discuss regarding related but divergent concepts of evidence based medicine and patient centered medicine.

Evidence based medicine is the integration of best research evidence, with clinical expertise, and patient values. The definition of patient centered medicine may seem obvious, but in actuality is a little fuzzy. Patient centered medicine focuses primarily on psychosocial issues, using explicit informed consent, shared decision making empowering the patient to assure the patients preferences are taken into account. It is fuzzy because there is a high degree of variability from one patient to another.

Evidence based medicine, a process of turning clinical problems into questions and then systematically locating, appraising, and using contemporaneous research findings as the basis for clinical decisions. Population based outcome research has repeatedly documented that those patients who do receive evidence based therapies have better outcomes than those who don't.

Research has shown the patient centered medicine has advantages of greater patient satisfaction scores; better patient compliance; higher self reported functional outcome scores, and fewer malpractice claims against healthcare providers. The disadvantages of patient centered medicine it takes more time and can be more costly. One problem is the potential for "cherry picking" by the patient. Choosing interventions which feel good, but where the intervention has been shown to be ineffective, or choosing not to follow recommended intervention despite the evidence the intervention is effective.

Ideally the paradigm of evidence based medicine and patient center medicine should be complementary and synergistic, but in reality they can be at odds. The focus of evidence is pathology oriented not patient oriented. The healthcare provider uses evidence to make recommendations to the patient, and the recommendations may or may not match the patients' expectations.

The potential discord between evidence based and patient centered approach is becoming more common because of the cost factor. Often patients expect multiple expensive diagnostic testing and the latest and most expensive interventions, yet the best available evidence may document better outcomes with fewer less expensive diagnostic tests, and simpler interventions. Health insurance companies often deny payment for treatments which lack evidence of effectiveness. Many of the complementary and alternative based interventions do not meet the standards of evidence established by conventional medicine. With more of the costs of health insurance shifting to the individual because of higher deductibles and higher co-payments individuals are starting to ask what the evidence is.

If you have a relationship with or are in a position of choosing a health care practitioner knowing the predisposition of your provider towards evidence based and patient centered medicine should facilitate the communication process. Patients and physicians can be better partners if they carry similar values and beliefs.

It should be relatively easy for you to determine if your physician practices in a patient centered manner. It is not so obvious if your health care practitioner is skilled at evidence based medicine. As a consumer of health care how do you recognize a health care provider who practices evidence based medicine?

A practitioner who uses evidence to make clinical decisions is more likely going to be able to answer questions with statistics and percentages. He may discourage you from undergoing a variety of diagnostic tests, and will likely recommend fewer rather than more interventions. He is likely to cite criteria used for decisions, and refer to established protocols and guidelines. He will explain why the treatment recommendation differs from the standard. For example the standard treatment for Achilles tendon problems is stretching exercises, but if the individual evidence is that your Achilles tendon is not short, and stretching exercise would not be indicated. This is an example of evidence based care. Patient education materials will likely have references cited. His attitude is more likely to be skeptical and rather than certain. He will appear comfortable with ambiguity or uncertainty, and may say I need to do some research on that question; I will get back to you.

Bottom line:

- If you sense that your healthcare provider is providing service that is both patient centered and evidence based trust him/her.

- If you sense that your healthcare provider is providing service that is patient centered, and weak on evidence be skeptical.
- If you sense that your healthcare provider is providing service that has a strongly inclined toward evidence and not patient centered be assertive
- If you sense that your healthcare provider is providing service that is neither patient centered nor evidence based find a new provider
- Awareness and improved communication between the healthcare provider and the patient is important to have a balanced approach between patient centered and evidence based care