

Comparative effectiveness of two information sheets for people with low back pain in primary care: a randomized clinical trial

We wanted to know

What is the comparative effectiveness of two different fact sheets in preparing patients with low back pain for decision-making?

What is the problem?

Low back pain is one of the most common reasons people seek medical care. While guidelines recommend providing advice and education, it's unclear what kind of information best supports patients. Many feel left out of decision-making, and healthcare professionals often lack high-quality resources and support to guide these conversations. To address this gap, this study tested two currently used fact sheets in primary care that mainly differed in their focus. The goal was to see which fact sheet better prepares patients to make informed decisions, which represents a key element of patient-centered care.



How did you study the problem?

Over 800 adults who had recently seen a doctor for back pain were randomly given one of the two fact sheets. One fact sheet simply listed medical and non-medical treatment options for back pain (information sheet) and the other fact sheet provided direct advice on self-management techniques for back pain (advice sheet). Immediately after reading the fact sheet, participants answered questions online about how prepared they felt to make treatment decisions. This was done without any influence from their doctor to reflect real-life use.

What did you find?

People who received the information sheet listing treatment options felt slightly more prepared to make decisions than those who received the advice sheet. This effect was stronger in people with chronic back pain.

How can this research be used?

One-page fact sheets that simply list treatment options may better support patients in making informed decisions, especially for those with chronic back pain. Healthcare professionals might consider using such sheets to support shared decision-making.

Cautions

The study looked only at immediate effects after reading the fact sheets. Long-term impact is unknown, and the differences were small. Further research is needed to understand which elements of fact sheets best support decision-making.

Reference: Longtin C, Chang JR, Hersch J, Sharma S, Ferraro MC, Rizzo RRN, McBride J, Wong AYL, Maher CG, Guppy M, McAuley JH, Traeger AC. One-page patient fact sheets for low back pain in primary care: A randomized clinical trial. JAMA Network Open, under review.

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