What is already known on this topic

Decision support technologies for patients (also known as decision aids) have received increasing interest over the past decade

A systematic review of randomised controlled trials confirmed many positive outcomes when these tools are used by patients and healthcare providers

No agreement exists about the content of the active components of decision aids, and no guidance exists about quality standards for their development and evaluation

What this study adds

A Delphi process, supported by summarised evidence reports, has provided substantial consensus about a framework of quality criteria for patient decision aids

The criteria are available as a users' checklist and are being used as a guide to developers of decision support

to attain. However, this quality framework emphasises the need to strive for designs that have favourable effects on decision quality. The criteria are not meant to be prescriptive, and an unresolved debate remains about what constitutes a minimum set of domains and criteria that should be met by a patient decision aid.

Implications

Quality criteria for patient decision aids are relevant to patients, healthcare professionals, healthcare service purchasers, and policy makers. The IPDAS Collaboration checklist is designed for existing users and for developers of new decision aids. To take the field forward, two things are now needed: firstly, to use the IPDAS framework as a basis for developing a validated instrument for assessing the internal quality of the decision tool; secondly, to develop an agreed way to

measure the impact of such tools on a range of outcomes.

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And we thought the British were obsessed with the weather

As a British doctor living and working in Germany, I remain constantly amazed by the frequency and ease—or perhaps what is better described as insatiable compulsion—with which the German people, including the younger generation, visit their local general practitioner. (It is also troubling to note the effect the German language has on the length of the average sentence, even when writing in English.) I was therefore not surprised to learn that one of the country's leading newspapers has a whole section of the weather report dedicated purely to "Biowetter"—in other words, how the weather today may affect you and your health.

During a spell of unceasing rain and snow, the Biowetter report stated: "People suffering from rheumatological diseases and arthritis must prepare themselves for a worsening of their pain. Cardiovascular patients with a tendency to high blood pressure

should not do anything strenuous. With the current weather conditions, those susceptible are likely to suffer from headaches. Operation scars are likely to be more noticeable."

This led me to wonder whether a daily, medically focused, weather report fortifies the beliefs and encourages the consultation-seeking behaviour of the health-preoccupied German population? Or is it there at the request of overworked, underpaid GPs to try to curtail the never ending presentation of minor ailments? Who knows? But perhaps, on my return to Britain, I might start a beautiful new career as a medical weather forecaster.

Jane E Graham *visiting doctor, Heidelberg University Hospital, Heidelberg, Germany* (jegraham@doctors.org.uk)