Interactive case report

A 64 year old woman with knee pain: case progression

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Last week (5 June, p1362) we presented the case of a 64 year old woman who was concerned about taking paracetamol (acetaminophen) after reading that it could cause liver damage when taken with alcohol at the high doses she required to control her knee pain. Her general practitioner had discussed with her the benefits and harms of paracetamol versus non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, but she felt she needed more information and time before making a decision.

Her general practitioner gave her a patient education decision aid package about paracetamol and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories for osteoarthritis.¹ He told her that this material describes the best evidence available today about the benefits and harms of both drugs and would help her work through a decision.² At

This case is fictional but was developed from several real cases. It was commissioned to contribute to the special issue on harms that will be published on 3 July 2004.

home the next day, Mrs Patell finds time to use the decision aid to help her think through how she values the benefits and harms of the two treatment options. She focuses on the decision about whether to switch to non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. The decision aid package guides her through six steps: clarifying the decision; rating the personal value of each benefit and harm; indicating her preferred role in decision making; identifying her unresolved decisional needs; planning the next steps; and, sharing her thinking with her doctor. She schedules a follow up appointment for the next week.

At her next appointment, Mrs Patell brings her decision aid (figure). Her general practitioner reads it over and notices that Mrs Patell wants to make the decision after considering her doctor's opinion. He uses the balance scale in the decision aid as a starting point to focus discussion. He acknowledges that Mrs Patell seems to place more importance on the harms of non-steroidals than on the benefits. Mrs Patell asks if her opinions make sense and what he would advise his mother to do in this situation.

He replies: "We all have our own opinions about how much importance we place on the benefits compared to the harms. If my mother was as concerned as you are about the harms of non-steroidals, it would not make sense for her to take them."

He then discusses the use of paracetamol with alcohol. Mrs Patell says she has cut out her pre-dinner cocktail but still has two glasses of wine with her dinner. She still worries about the risk she is taking but believes that life is not worth living without her wine.

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- 1 O'Connor AM, Stacey D, Entwistle V, Llewellyn-Thomas H, Rovner D, Holmes-Rovner M, et al. Decision aids for people facing health treatment or screening decisions. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2003;(2):CD001431.
- 2 Ottawa Health Research Institute. *A-Z inventory of decision aids*. <http://decisionaid.ohri.ca/AZinvent.php> (accessed 24 May 2004).

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This is the second of a three part case report where we invite readers to take part in considering the diagnosis and management of a case using the rapid response feature on bmj.com. In three weeks' time we will report the outcome and summarise the responses

STEP 1: Clarify what you need to decide

What is the decision? **Should I switch from paracetamol to NSAIDs?**

When does this decision have to be made? ☐ within days ☒ within weeks ☐ within months

How far along are you with this decision? ☐ I have not thought about it yet
☒ I am considering the choices
☐ I am close to making a choice
☐ I have already made a choice

STEP 2: Consider the pros and cons of choices

1. Review the common pros and cons below.
2. Add any other pros and cons that are important to you.
3. Show how important each pro and con is to you by circling from one (*) star if it is a little important to you, to up to five (*****) stars, if it is very important to you.

Pros and cons of NSAID treatment			
Pros (No of people affected)	How important is this to you?	Cons (No of people affected)	How important is this to you?
Improves pain (gold) 890 out of 1000 people improve with NSAIDs compared to 730 out of 1000 people with paracetamol	****	Side effects more common: heartburn, stomach cramps, nausea/vomiting, constipation (gold) 180 out of 1000 people had these side effects with NSAIDs compared to 70 out of 1000 people with paracetamol	****
Alcohol is not restricted with NSAIDs (bronze) Avoids the risk of liver disease (1 out of 1000) and possible death when people using paracetamol have 4-5 drinks daily	****	Serious harms: hospital admission or death from bleeding stomach ulcers (silver) 13-16 out of 1000 people taking NSAIDs go to hospital or die from stomach ulcers that bleed or make holes	****
Other pros: Gives me more relief than other drugs - can help husband more with household tasks	****	More clinic visits and blood tests are needed when taking NSAIDs	****
		Other cons: Worried about risks	****

What do you think about taking NSAIDs? Check ☒ one

☐ Willing to consider this drug
Pros are more important to me than the Cons

☐ Unsure

☒ Not willing to consider this drug
Cons are more important to me than the Pros

STEP 3: Choose the role you want to have in choosing your treatment

☒ I prefer to decide on my own after listening to the opinions of others **my GP**

STEP 4: Identify what you need to help you make the decision

What I know	Do you know enough about your condition?	Yes	No	Unsure
Do you know which choices you have?	Yes	Yes	No	Unsure
Do you know the good points and bad points of each choice?	Yes	Yes	No	Unsure
What's important	Is it clear which good points and bad points are most important to you?	Yes	No	Unsure
How others help	Do you have enough support and advice to make a choice?	Yes	No	Unsure
	Are you choosing without pressure from others?	Yes	No	Unsure
How sure I feel	Do you feel sure about the best choice for you?	Yes	No	Unsure

STEP 5: Plan the next steps

What do you need to do before you make this decision? **I need to get my GP's opinion**

STEP 6: Share the information on this form with your doctor.

Mrs Patell's decision aid regarding treatment with paracetamol or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

Questions

1. Based on the importance that Mrs Patell places on the benefits and harms, which option should Mrs Patell choose?
2. What do you think of the value of such decision aids for patients?
3. What are the pros and cons of using such decision aids in practice?

Please respond through bmj.com