

Shared Decision-Making Considerations for COVID-19 Treatment

Shared decision-making between a patient and their physician is an important aspect of medical care. It involves you and your patient working together to make decisions about their treatment plan based on the best available evidence.¹ Benefits of SDM include increasing the patient's understanding of their condition and available treatment options, improving patient-physician communication, building trust and increasing patient satisfaction.² Research has also shown that prioritizing patients' involvement in clinic visits and encouraging them to take a more active role in decision-making leads to positive health outcomes.^{1,3} A collaborative approach can be particularly useful when you are [treating patients who are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes](#).

The SHARE Approach

When you are ready to initiate a conversation about COVID-19 treatment options with a patient, consider using the SHARE Approach. This process was developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to facilitate SDM between clinicians and their patients. It involves the following five steps⁴:

- Step 1** **SEEK YOUR PATIENT'S PARTICIPATION** by communicating to them that options exist and encouraging them to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Step 2** **HELP YOUR PATIENT EXPLORE AND COMPARE TREATMENT OPTIONS** by communicating the benefits and harms of each option.
- Step 3** **ASSESS YOUR PATIENT'S VALUES AND PREFERENCES** by communicating to the patient that their input and values matter.
- Step 4** **REACH A DECISION WITH YOUR PATIENT** by discussing and choosing the best available option together and scheduling a follow-up appointment.
- Step 5** **EVALUATE YOUR PATIENT'S DECISION** by communicating your support for their decision to help ensure a positive treatment impact.

S – Seek
H – Help
A – Assess
R – Reach
E – Evaluate

The [AHRQ Shared Decision Making Toolkit website](#) provides resources to help clinicians implement the SHARE Approach with their patients.

Ethical Principles and Social Determinants of Health

When you use the SHARE Approach, ethical principles including autonomy, beneficence and nonmaleficence should guide the SDM process.⁵ Physicians and other health care professionals should prioritize patients' well-being while also respecting their autonomy and choices.

In addition, COVID-19 affects individuals differently, so it is important to consider factors such as the patient’s age, their underlying health conditions and the severity of their illness when making treatment decisions. A number of social determinants of health (*Table 1*) can also contribute to suboptimal COVID-19 treatment uptake.⁶ By addressing these factors, family physicians can work toward ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 treatment for all populations.⁷

Table 1. Social Determinants of Health That Can Affect COVID-19 Treatment Uptake⁶

Education
Employment and economic stability
Health insurance coverage
Housing and living conditions
Information access
Language and health literacy
Racial and ethnic disparities
Social support and networks
Socioeconomic status
Stigma and cultural beliefs
Transportation

References

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American Academy of Family Physicians members can access [The EveryONE Project™: COVID-19 and Health Equity](#), a free CME activity that gives insight into using an SDM approach with your patients and provides helpful strategies for reducing the impact of COVID-19 health care disparities.