

Role of Psychologist in Patient Empowerment and Decision Making in Clinical Settings: A Quick Review

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ABSTRACT

This review explores the role of psychologists in supporting patient empowerment and decision-making in clinical settings. Patients often experience uncertainty and lack confidence when faced with complex medical decisions. Psychologists play a pivotal role in guiding these patients by simplifying medical information and helping them understand potential outcomes, treatment options, and the associated risks and benefits. By employing evidence-based guidelines from sources like Cochrane and NICE, psychologists deliver tailored, research-backed support that aligns patient choices with personal values and goals. This tailored guidance enhances patient satisfaction and confidence, and it helps bridge communication gaps between patients and medical practitioners. Psychologists' involvement in decision support allows medical professionals to focus on treatment, while psychologists foster patient autonomy and understanding. Such collaboration streamlines patient care, reduces decision-related anxiety, and ensures that patients make well-informed choices aligned with their values. Ultimately, integrating psychological counselling into healthcare not only promotes patient-centered care but also improves health outcomes and overall system efficiency. Further research should focus on refining these counselling approaches and validating their impact in diverse healthcare settings.

Keywords: *Patient empowerment, Decision-making, Psychological counselling, Evidence-based guidelines, Patient-centered care, Cochrane, NICE, Clinical decision support, Health outcomes, Patient autonomy*

Many patients, when facing complex medical decisions, often experience feelings of uncertainty and lack confidence in their ability to make an informed choice. This is where psychologists play a pivotal role, using evidence-based tools to support and guide patients through the decision-making process. Psychologists can help prepare patients to better understand their medical condition by simplifying the information, making it accessible and easy to digest. For those with higher levels of education, psychologists may offer more comprehensive approaches, diving deeper into the details of the condition, the available treatments, and the likely outcomes. By discussing both proposed and alternative treatments, along with potential side effects, benefits, and quality-of-life implications, psychologists empower patients with knowledge. This tailored guidance not only helps patients make more informed decisions but also enhances their overall satisfaction with their

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choices, as they become better equipped to weigh the outcomes of different treatment paths (Stacey et al., 2017; Elwyn et al., 2012; Charles et al., 1997).

Although psychologists may not always alter a patient's initial preferences, their support can lead to deeper self-awareness, helping patients to reflect on their values and priorities regarding health and quality of life. Psychologists are especially impactful for patients who are highly uncertain, as they encourage reflection on personal values in the context of medical choices. By discussing what aspects of health and well-being matter most to the patient, psychologists enable them to align treatment options with their personal goals. This heightened awareness and understanding foster patient autonomy, reduce decision-related anxiety, and improve the likelihood that patients will feel confident and satisfied with their choices. Ultimately, psychologists' involvement in this process serves to bridge the gap between medical information and personal relevance, helping patients arrive at decisions that are well-informed and closely aligned with their values and expectations (Elwyn et al., 2015; Hoffmann et al., 2014; Légaré et al., 2008).

The objective of this research is to examine the role of psychologists in supporting patient empowerment and informed decision-making within clinical settings. Specifically, this study seeks to evaluate how evidence-based psychological interventions, guided by established frameworks such as Cochrane and NICE, enhance patient understanding, satisfaction, and alignment of medical choices with personal values. Additionally, it aims to explore the collaborative role of psychologists in bridging communication gaps between patients and medical practitioners, reducing decisional conflict, and fostering a patient-centered approach. By identifying effective practices and challenges, this research provides insights into the integration of psychological counselling to improve healthcare outcomes and patient engagement.

METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE REVIEW

A narrative review approach will be employed to synthesize current literature on the role of psychologists in patient empowerment and decision-making within clinical settings. The review will focus on studies that explore evidence-based interventions utilized by psychologists to support patients in making informed healthcare decisions. Sources are drawn from PubMed, Cochrane Collaboration, Google Scholar, and other relevant databases. Key search terms included are "psychologist role in healthcare decision-making," "evidence-based counselling," "patient empowerment," and "clinical decision support."

Variability in Patient Preferences and the Role of Psychologists in Decision Support

In certain medical decisions, there may not be a single "best" option, as patients differ in the value they assign to the benefits and risks of various treatment or screening choices. Additionally, scientific evidence regarding the benefits and potential harms of each option can be uncertain. Some clinical guidelines advise that patients communicate their values and preferences to their healthcare providers, especially for treatment and screening decisions where the optimal course of action depends on the personal significance attributed to the benefits versus the risks (Barry et al., 2012).

Psychologists play a critical role in decision support by utilizing evidence-based guidelines to empower patients and streamline decision-making, reducing the burden on busy medical practitioners. By drawing on established resources such as Cochrane and NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) recommendations, psychologists can effectively

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deliver tailored, research-backed information to patients. This approach ensures that patients understand their medical options and are equipped to weigh the potential benefits and risks of each choice in alignment with their values and health goals (Thompson & Guideline Development Group, 2021; Joseph-Williams et al., 2014; Coulter & Collins, 2011).

Utilizing Evidence-Based Guidelines to Enhance Patient-Centered Care and Empowerment

Evidence-based guidelines from organizations like Cochrane and NICE provide a rigorously reviewed foundation for effective patient-centered care, particularly in complex treatment or screening scenarios where decisions may not be straightforward. These guidelines are valuable for identifying treatments that have been shown to deliver significant benefits and assessing the potential for adverse outcomes. Psychologists can use this high-quality information to craft interventions that are both informative and relevant to individual patients, enabling patients to engage more confidently with their healthcare choices. For example, Cochrane recommendations are grounded in systematic reviews, which consolidate findings from multiple studies to present a comprehensive view of effective medical interventions. When psychologists apply these insights, they provide patients with a clearer understanding of what treatments or lifestyle changes are most likely to improve their health outcomes (O'Connor et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the support that psychologists provide can enhance patient empowerment, a critical component of effective healthcare. Empowered patients are more likely to participate actively in their healthcare journey, leading to improved treatment adherence and overall satisfaction. Through tools like decision aids, risk communication strategies, and personal counselling sessions, psychologists can help patients navigate their treatment options, clarify their health priorities, and reduce anxiety associated with complex medical decisions. This leads to more informed patient choices and facilitates a partnership between patient and provider, in which the patient feels more control over their care decisions (McAllister et al., 2012).

Collaborative Decision Support: Enhancing Patient Care through Evidence-Based Interventions

Incorporating evidence-based decision support into healthcare systems serves as an essential complement to physicians' roles, especially when time constraints limit in-depth patient discussions. Psychologists effectively bridge this gap by dedicating the time needed to educate patients on clinical information, reinforcing understanding, and addressing any personal values and concerns. This collaborative approach enhances patient care, allowing each professional to leverage their specific expertise. Physicians can concentrate on diagnosis and treatment planning, while psychologists focus on guiding patients through decision-making processes, helping them make choices that align with their values and the recommended clinical path. This partnership not only streamlines patient care but also fosters a comprehensive support system where medical decisions are both clinically sound and personally meaningful (Kazdin, 2008; Spring, 2007; Adams & Drake, 2006).

Decision support interventions grounded in validated guidelines from resources like Cochrane, NICE, or other reputable evidence-based frameworks significantly enhance patient care. These interventions not only empower patients by promoting their autonomy and engagement but also relieve some of the informational and emotional pressures faced by physicians. By offering patients clear, research-backed information, psychologists contribute to better patient understanding, aligning healthcare decisions with individual values and

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preferences. This approach not only improves health outcomes but also cultivates a more supportive and efficient healthcare system, where patient care is personalized and practitioners can focus more effectively on clinical responsibilities (Vázquez et al., 2020; Durand et al., 2014; Elwyn et al., 2013; Joosten et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Due to time constraints and other factors, the communication and counselling provided by physicians and surgeons may not always fully meet patients' needs when it comes to understanding complex medical conditions and making value-based treatment decisions. Physicians, often pressed for time, may be unable or hesitant to engage in extended discussions about treatment options, or patients may feel reluctant to communicate openly due to information gaps and other barriers. Consequently, patients require clear and accessible information about treatment options and potential outcomes to effectively weigh the benefits and risks. This understanding enables them to convey to their healthcare providers the personal importance they place on the proposed treatments, ensuring that their values and preferences are meaningfully integrated into their care decisions (Stiggelbout et al., 2015; Dixon-Woods et al., 2012).

Psychological counselling provides essential support in clinical decision-making, helping patients gain knowledge, set realistic expectations, and reduce indecision. It enhances patient understanding of medical options, clarifies personal values regarding treatment benefits and risks, and fosters active participation in healthcare decisions. By offering structured guidance and emotional support, psychologists ensure that treatment choices align with patient preferences, improving satisfaction and confidence in the chosen care path (Dwamena et al., 1996; Charles et al., 1997).

Distinguishing Psychological Counselling from General Health Education

Psychological counselling is distinct from typical health education materials due to its use of evidence-based guidelines that are detailed, specific, and tailored to individual patient needs, particularly in preparing patients for informed decision-making. While health education materials provide a broad overview of diagnosis, treatment, and management, their focus is often general, lacking the nuanced, personalized support needed to help patients make specific choices about treatment options. By contrast, psychological counselling aims to engage patients in understanding the potential outcomes and values-based trade-offs of each option, empowering them to make decisions that are closely aligned with their personal preferences and health goals. This approach is not only informational but also integrative, providing a structured framework that guides patients through the complexities of medical decisions with an emphasis on individual relevance and clarity (Stacey et al., 2017).

The Role of Psychological Counselling in Enhancing Patient Decision-Making and Outcomes

During counselling sessions, psychologists provide patients with comprehensive information tailored to their needs, including details on their specific disease or condition, personalized probabilities of clinical outcomes based on individual health risk factors, and relevant opinions or insights from other patients and medical practitioners. This tailored approach also considers the patient's clinical characteristics and expressed preferences, aiming to enhance communication between patients and healthcare providers, reduce decisional conflict, and support knowledge sharing. Through clear, structured discussions, psychologists help patients establish realistic expectations and clarify their personal values,

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aligning these with potential clinical outcomes and chosen procedures. Counselling sessions are designed to foster agreement between personal values and the selected course of action, leading to greater satisfaction with the decision, the decision-making process, and the support provided. Furthermore, psychological counselling contributes to higher health-related quality of life, adherence to the chosen treatment, reduced emotional distress, and lower levels of anxiety, depression, and regret. Ultimately, the most notable and consistent benefits of psychological counselling, compared to standard communication by healthcare staff, are enhanced patient knowledge of treatment options and outcomes, along with a more grounded understanding of the realistic benefits and risks associated with each option. This informed approach leads to better alignment with patient preferences and reduced likelihood of post-decision regret or litigation (Politi et al., 2013; Volk et al., 2013).

Supporting Individualized Decision-Making through Psychological Counselling and Patient-Centered Tools

In the decision-making process, patients initially receive information about their condition, options, and potential outcomes from their consulting doctor. If further support is needed, psychologists help patients explore personal concerns related to their treatment choices. For example, psychologists assist patients in clarifying values by using a scale to assess the perceived importance of benefits and risks (e.g., healthy bones, heart, and breast health). They present examples of cases from standard clinics where different patients have chosen various options, including no treatment, providing insight into diverse decision rationales. This approach reinforces the understanding that medical decisions should be individualized. A worksheet may aid patients in processing objective information, encouraging them to apply this knowledge to their unique circumstances and enabling them to communicate their preferences with others involved in their care, such as family members or clinicians (Stacey et al., 2017).

Psychologists should guide patients in using evidence-based guidelines, summarized in a manual or practice guideline, and supported by CME workshops to keep psychologists updated on the latest evidence. Following counselling, the patient's completed worksheet serves as a basis for follow-up discussions with their medical consultant. This worksheet provides the practitioner with insight into the patient's personalized understanding of choices, perceived benefits and risks, and preferences for participation in decision-making. By reviewing these factors, the medical practitioner can effectively support the patient's decision-making process and seamlessly transition to treatment planning (Littlejohn's et al., 2019).

Brief Steps in Counselling for Decision-Making

- 1. Identify Needs:** The initial step involves baseline assessments to identify factors that may lead to suboptimal decision-making. Psychologists evaluate whether patients have adequate knowledge of their options, realistic expectations of potential outcomes, and clarity about their personal values. Patients often enter counselling with a predisposition toward a particular treatment option, yet they may still experience challenges in decision-making, such as lack of comprehensive information on options and outcomes or ambiguity about their values.
- 2. Provide Decision Support:** The psychologist's approach to decision support is based on delivering scientific information, guidelines, or both, structured around the patient's needs. This includes providing clear, evidence-based details about the

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available options and structuring follow-up counselling sessions to ensure patients feel fully supported in their decision-making journey.

- 3. Evaluate Decision Support:** Because decisions reliant on personal values are subjective, they cannot be judged purely as right or wrong; a well-informed decision might still yield a less favourable outcome due to the variability in clinical results. For this reason, a "good" decision is defined by the psychologist as one that is informed, aligned with the patient's values, acted upon confidently, and leaves the patient feeling satisfied with their decision-making process (Coulter et al, 2017).

Challenges in Patient Decision-Making

Implementing psychological counseling in practice requires overcoming several key challenges. First, high-quality, evidence-based recommendations are essential to meet diverse patient needs, ensuring that counseling is grounded in robust scientific knowledge. Psychologists must also be open to incorporating clinical counseling within their practice, adopting a supportive role in patients' healthcare decision-making processes. Effective systems for delivering decision support are needed to streamline and structure these interventions, coupled with further training to enhance practitioners' skills in handling complex decisions. Psychologists must also be equipped to recognize patients struggling with healthcare choices and be committed to providing or arranging necessary support. The involvement of experienced psychologists is crucial for mentoring emerging practitioners through continuous education (CE) programs, fostering a culture of professional development. Additionally, strict guidelines for quality assurance, professional ethics, and maintaining the sanctity of counseling practices are essential to uphold high standards in psychological care (Elwyn et al., 2012).

CONCLUSION

Psychologists play a vital role in empowering patients within clinical settings by using evidence-based tools to support informed decision-making. Through structured counselling, psychologists help patients clarify their values, understand medical options, and reduce decisional conflict, ultimately enhancing patient autonomy, satisfaction, and alignment with personal health goals. By bridging the communication gap between patients and medical practitioners, psychologists complement physicians' roles, enabling a more collaborative and patient-centered approach. As the integration of psychological counselling in healthcare grows, it promises to foster better patient outcomes and a more supportive, efficient healthcare system that respects patient preferences and values.

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Conflict of Interest

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