



LETTERS

PATIENT CHOICE IN THE NHS

Patient choice in the NHS: capturing “decision regret”Arthur Sun Myint *lead clinician, Papillon*

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust, Wirral CH63 4JY, UK

Kar asks whether genuine choice is possible in the NHS.¹ This is definitely an issue for some patients with cancer. Consenting clinicians do not always explain the possible treatment options and traditionally consent patients for the option that they as clinicians think is right for the patient, generally regarded as “the standard of care.”

The treatment is usually what the multidisciplinary team or the guidelines has recommended. Most of these recommendations do not consider the patient’s preferred treatment option, which depends on many factors including the patient’s personal, physical, psychological or spiritual beliefs, experiences, and needs. The patient might be prepared to accept less successful treatment outcomes in terms of cure to avoid surgery or a stoma. Alternative treatments are not usually mentioned, even for older patients or those at higher surgical risk.

Patients might not know what is best for them, but they certainly know what they don’t want and what they can’t cope with

psychologically, though they may be physically fit for it. After all, they are the ones who must cope with the consequences of the treatment they receive for the rest of their lives.

We are trying to capture this “decision regret” in our national database of patient reported outcome measures for contact x ray brachytherapy (Papillon technique), which is supported by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. We do not need level one evidence or a randomised trial for this. In a tax funded system with competing interests and a finite financial pot, can patients have a genuine choice?

Competing interests: None declared.

1 Kar P. Partha Kar: Is genuine patient choice possible in the NHS? *BMJ* 2019;366:l4741. 10.1136/bmj.l4741 31337607

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>