

EVIDENCE BASED DECISION MAKING- AN UNAVOIDABLE REALITY IN MEDICAL PRACTICE**Dr. Sushma Praveen Kulkarni***

Associate Prof, Pathology, Dr D Y Patil Medical College, Hospital and Research Center, Pune-18.

***Corresponding Author: Dr. Sushma Praveen Kulkarni**

Associate Prof, Pathology, Dr D Y Patil Medical College, Hospital and Research Center, Pune-18.

Article Received on 30/05/2022

Article Revised on 20/06/2022

Article Accepted on 10/07/2022

"Every successful decision making depends on a optimal balance between deliberate and instinctive thinking" Malcolm Gladwell

Evidence is the term which has a very significant weightage in today's digital world. Every decision can be questioned for evidence. Decisions when turned out to be good will be applauded by one and all. The difficulty arises when the decision goes wrong or does not meet the expectations. There was an era when individuals' experiences, designation and intuitions were the factors relied upon for decision making.

Quoting,

"Decision-making can be a complex process and it always involves certain degree of uncertainty. It will involve multiple sources of inputs, as well as their interpretation, which can be very subjective in themselves. It is of utmost importance to understand causal and effect relationships and potential unintended consequences. Facts such as evidence, statistics analysis of this data leads to greater objectivity and confidence in decision making". - ISO9000

Medical decision making is even more complex because it relies not only on physicians knowledge and experience but also on judgement making in individual cases. This requires application of probabilistic reasoning. There is substantial variation across patients, often large volumes of conflicting information of uncertain validity and reliability that evolves and changes rapidly and is distributed among disparate sources. Theoretically speaking, medical decision making is hypothesis driven. Initial observations generate preliminary hypotheses. As additional information is gathered, the hypotheses are revised and refined further. Hypotheses are then verified for coherence. American Medical Association Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) in its manual has established three variables of complexity of medical decision making, viz.

1. The number of possible diagnosis or management options available
2. The complexity of the investigations to be reviewed and analyzed
3. The risk of complications such as morbidity or mortality associated with the diagnostic tests or management options

These factors are also reflected in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Documentation Guidelines for Evaluation and Management Services. The CMS recognizes four types of Medical Decision Making:

- Straightforward
- Low complexity
- Moderate complexity
- High complexity

Without going into the details of the types, it is obvious that these differences are due to the vast amount of data and evidence available. These factors come into play when a doctor goes above and beyond the case in question for definitive diagnosis.

The doctor needs to pick up the right decision keeping in mind the best possible option for the case in view. The more complex the decision for the treating doctor, the more financial burden the patient faces owing to the 'n' number of investigations undertaken for decision making

'I believe in evidence based decision making, I want to know what the facts are' -Hillary Clinton

This statement holds right to the so-called educated population with the google search at hand. They would have scrolled through the information available and come up with management suggestions to the doctors!! This leaves no scope for interpretation of clinical skills and expertise of the doctor. The doctor has no choice but to start gathering evidence to his or her support.

On a lighter note, someone placed a placard in his clinic which read...

'This is a self help hospital. You diagnose and treat yourself. We offer high speed WiFi'

Jokes apart, the situation and information available all around has left the doctors with no choice but to gather evidence to support their interpretation.

Nevertheless, evidence has its own profound uses in this ever evolving world of medical knowledge. In this era with aides for evidence collection at every point, evidence has become the cornerstone for decision making. The decision based on evidence ensures that the relevant facts are taken into consideration before jumping to conclusion. The Center for Evidence-based Decision Making has identified four types of sources of data.

These include

1. Empirical studies from academic journals,
2. Internal company data which implies intra departmental data,
3. Professional expertise from practitioners and
4. Values and concerns of stakeholders, referring to the patient in the healthcare industry.

Now, when we consider the patient's perspective, diagnosis is hardly a concern. The matters of importance are different for the patient. Surprisingly, it may not be always desirable to make a diagnosis. The following statements will add on to the thought process.

Firstly,

→ People do not want treatment for a certain disease.

And secondly,

→ There is never a best treatment for a certain disease.

A quote which balances the dilemma states,

“Every man must reach his own verdict, by optimally judging all the available evidence”

-Leonard Peikoff (Philosopher and Author)

Every aspect of life has its pros and cons. This holds true to medical decision making as well. With loads of advantages, evidence based decision making has its disadvantages too. When used with wisdom, the evidence will always be a shield for the clinicians. The evidence which the doctor can use to support his hypothesis or in many cases to generate the hypothesis!

The optimal decision is taken if one takes into account,

- Experience and judgment of the clinician
- Clinical or patient circumstances
- Scientific evidence
- Patient preferences or values

The decision is said to be optimal if and only if all the points mentioned above are given equivalent importance.

To conclude

Evidence based practice emphasizes using the data and results of investigations to make right decisions. The era before us were never questioned for their judgments in management, thanks to the faith the people had in the

wisdom of an experienced doctor. The current and the future world is and will demand evidence for every step taken in management of the condition in question. To put it in one sentence, clinical effectiveness is the end goal of every health care decision, which can very well be backed with evidence, as it determines the overall outcome.