



Group encourages wisdom in health care

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PROVO -- A group of a health care professionals, business and community leaders who recently launched Choosing Wisely Utah is encouraging the wise use of health care resources.

"At its core, the Choosing Wisely campaign is about helping patients get the right care at the right time," according to a statement by Brian Jackson, M.D., an assistant professor of clinical pathology at the University of Utah.

The local group has encouraged dialogue about the issue, and recent study results were presented at Utah Valley University on Monday.

"This is what questions the consumers and doctors should ask about the costs and benefits," said Scott Barlow, the CEO of Central Utah Clinic. "Is it really necessary? What are the alternatives? Then they should draw on their own personal and professional judgment."

David Jackson, who works at First West Benefit Solutions said asking questions sends a message to health care providers.

"That message is to be responsible and that costs do matter," he said

Jason Stevenson represented the Utah Health Policy Project, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization helping the uninsured and curbing rising health care costs. His wife is a family physician.

"When people ask about costs now, my wife has no idea," he said. "It will become more likely the doctors will know, the more they are asked."

A panel that presented the study results Monday included advice from health care experts for patients to be more engaged in solving problems with doctors.

"That helps focus the discussion in a helpful way," said David Shute, an internal medicine doctor in Portland, Ore.

Other priorities suggested by the group were for patients to understand their insurance plan and tell the doctor what procedures are covered, and asking the doctor what alternatives are available.

Patients or caregivers often get health solutions from unreliable sources, the experts said.

"Parents insist on an antibiotic from their pediatrician when a child has a runny nose and cough that just wouldn't go away," Jackson wrote. "Or a worker with chronic low back pain shops for a new doctor willing to operate when his current one tells him surgery is not the best option.

"The goal is to help doctors and patients collaborate toward better informed decisions."

Barlow said he has seen patients' families seek unnecessary tests or treatment.

"A college student fell and his mom insisted on a CT scan," he said. "Because of a lack of education and information, they weren't able to do what was right in his case. He also had significant unnecessary radiation exposure."

There are simple ways that patients can be educated. One is to have pamphlets available in the doctor's waiting room, outlining diseases or conditions and possible treatments.

As treatments and technologies are considered, the costs may be difficult to understand.

The average patient goes to the doctor 3.1 times a year, Barlow said. Those who suffer from chronic disease see six different doctors during the course of a year, and 75 percent of the time those six doctors are in different health care systems.

Some of those patients are not aware of the basics of health care, Stevenson said.

"We had a lot of people who don't know what a deductible is," he said. "Imagine trying to explain the difference between an X-ray, CT scan and MRI to them."