

Evaluating nuanced practices for initiating decision-making in neurology clinics: a mixed-methods study

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Plain English summary

Initiating decision-making in neurology clinics

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Aims

The NHS is committed to offering patients choice. In this study, we compared what happens when doctors recommend treatments, investigations and referrals with when they give choice about these things.

How the study worked

This study builds on a previous study we carried out in neurology clinics. We had already collected 223 video- and audio-recordings of consultations as well as responses to questionnaires. In this study, we used these recordings and questionnaire responses to map out each time a neurologist used a recommendation or offered choice. We looked for patterns in when and how these were used and how patients replied.

What we found out

Despite clear guidance to offer patients choice, neurologists use recommendations much of the time. Some neurologists almost always use just recommendations and some almost always offer choice. So whether or not a patient gets choice can depend on which neurologist they see. When recommendations are used, patients almost always end up agreeing to do what the neurologist suggested. When choice is offered, there is more of a balance between patients agreeing or declining a possible test, treatment or referral. We found that neurologists do sometimes change their approach to decision-making. For example, they are more likely to make recommendations when they are not sure how to explain a patient's symptoms. When they are more certain, they tend to offer more choice. Our study suggests that doctors may be more likely to avoid offering choice if they are more worried about what the patient may decide.

Conclusions

Giving patients choice is not always easy to put into practice. We think that future guidance needs to use the evidence about how choice is offered in real-time interactions between doctors and patients. This may help doctors and patients to share the decision-making in ways that both consider appropriate.

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