

**Case study:**

# Learning from the process of developing a decision support tool

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Evidence shows that patients who use decision support tools are more informed and able to take part in active decision making. As developing these tools can take time and money, many clinical conditions with multiple treatment options lack the specific tools patients need. In Cardiff, one team has met these challenges, creating tools to help patients make choices about head and neck cancer treatments.

## What happened?

Cardiff's head and neck cancer team were particularly interested in using decision support tools. When they discovered none were suitable for their needs, they decided to develop their own. With MAGIC's support, the team created 'Option Grids'. These are brief 'gist based' tools, designed for use during clinical encounters. Information about the key features, benefits and risks of treatment options, are organised against the questions patients' most frequently ask in a table format, allowing rapid access and comparison.

At the outset, the team met and agreed three priority areas: early cancer of the tonsil, early cancer of the vocal cords and cancer of the voice box. A clinical editor was appointed for each area, and small groups of clinical experts from surgery and oncology formed to collect evidence-based information on treatment options. Research on what is important to patients has been used to inform how information is presented. Draft option grids were shared with the wider clinical team for discussion and patients have been asked for their feedback

## What was the impact?

As a result of this work, which took place over several months, the head and neck team now have three option grids to use as catalysts for shared decision making during consultations.

Additionally, the head and neck teams' involvement in the development process has:

- enabled a team-based understanding of shared decision making

- increased awareness of the importance of presenting treatment options
- standardised how patients are told information about their treatment options, narrowing the variance between clinicians
- aided the development of tools for local situations
- given teams a sense of ownership
- increased discussion about reasonable treatment options and the evidence – or lack of evidence – about likely risks and benefits of options
- led to further discussion about how shared decision making can be part of a strong professionally-oriented multidisciplinary team.

'Shared decision-making has proved to be a really good way of individualising patients' choices,' says Alun. 'We found that patients were very receptive and they also liked going home with a piece of paper.'

## What are the lessons?

The Option Grid development process creates a product (i.e. Option Grid), which can be used as a catalyst for shared decision making during a consultation; thus promoting shared decision making.

- The development process increases engagement and buy-in with the concept of shared decision making, and helps to overcome some of the common barriers associated with implementing decision support tools.
- You need to maximise engagement, otherwise colleagues can be suspicious of what you're doing.
- Don't run before you can crawl – first work out how to do it well once before moving on to developing tools for other clinical areas
- Be prepared for surprises, including the attitudes of some of your colleagues.