

Media Release

Med students devise map for prostate biopsy decisions

St. Catharines, ON (Nov. 30, 2015) – Sometimes it takes a map to plan the route through a complex decision, and Niagara medical students have come up with such a chart for men facing decisions about prostate cancer issues.

Elan Hahn and Matthew Baron, third-year students of the Michael G. DeGroot School of Medicine at McMaster University's Niagara Regional Campus, have created a diagram, or 'decision box', tool to improve patients' ability to make confident and competent decisions about their own care. Their work was overseen by adjunct professor Dr. Ian Brown of the Niagara Health System.

The tool, for patients whose prostate cancer screening has shown some potential abnormalities, shows the options of choice for each decision, and allows patients and their doctors to review and discuss in developing a route through a decision.

"I know that men face a complex and difficult decision on whether to undergo a prostate biopsy, as often there is no clear choice," said Hahn.

"Shared-decision making between patient and specialist becomes an extremely important element of the clinical encounter. The decision box allows patients to follow their different options and the advantages and disadvantages to the next decision, with their implications."

Dr. Matt Greenway, the Niagara Regional Campus research lead, added: "Decision boxes make complex information more accessible for patients, allowing them to participate fully in their health care.

"This research, performed by our medical students under the guidance of Dr. Brown, helps men in Niagara feel more confident about their decision to undergo a prostate biopsy or not. Practical research efforts like this solve clinical problems and improve the quality of care in Niagara."

The tool was piloted with both patient and physician focus groups to assess viability, usefulness and clarity. The tool was then put into clinical practice at Niagara Health System's Prostate Diagnostic Assessment Clinic, which opened in 2014. Patients have been positive about the tool's effectiveness.

"The results of this study are quite interesting," said Brown, who is the clinic's lead urologist. "Men who are considering a prostate biopsy find the decision box as useful as their discussion with the specialist. When it comes to deciding how to proceed, patients want to have an active role in their decisions around a prostate biopsy. A

decision box is a tool that frames the pros and cons of a procedure in a way that empowers our patients.”

The study recently won an award at the recent American Society for Clinical Pathology conference in California.

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For more information:

Veronica McGuire

Media Relations
Faculty of Health Sciences
McMaster University
(905) 525-9140, ext. 22169

Erica Walters

Community Engagement & Development Officer
Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine
Niagara Regional Campus
McMaster University
(905) 378-5717 ext. 6416

Steven Gallagher

Communications Specialist
Niagara Health System
(905) 378-4647, ext. 43879