So You Want To Start A Choosing Wisely® Campaign

We all know the value of being a good consumer. A little bit of research and knowing how to ask the best questions can help us buy the best car, best refrigerator, the best television and even the best toothpaste.

We often don’t think about being good consumers when it comes to healthcare. We’re confronted with a daily barrage of healthcare promotion in the form of advertisements, television and radio spots, and even social media. We need good unbiased and reliable information to be better consumers.

Choosing Wisely helps patients communicate better with their physicians by learning how to ask important questions.

Choosing Wisely is a campaign from the ABIM (American Board of Internal Medicine) Foundation and over 70 medical specialty societies. The campaign promotes sound scientific medical evidence from physicians to improve the quality and reduce the cost of healthcare. Consumer Reports, the publisher of the familiar magazine that rates products and services, is the leader in the consumer-facing portion of the campaign.

Choosing Wisely takes the scientific evidence for what should and shouldn’t be done and puts it into an easy-to-digest format for both physicians and consumers/patients. But perhaps just as important, Choosing Wisely helps patients communicate better with their physicians by learning how to ask important questions.

Consumer Reports suggests starting your Choosing Wisely campaign by promoting the Five Questions to ask Your Doctor Before You Get Any Test, Treatment, or Medical Procedure.

The Five Questions are:

1. Do I really need this test or procedure?
2. What are the risks?
3. Are there simpler, safer options?
4. What happens if I don’t do anything?
5. How much does it cost?

Those five questions can make all the difference in the world. They aren’t about challenging the physician. They are about being sure you understand why something is going to be done and assuring your physician understands your feelings and decisions. It’s a process called “shared decision-making,” now considered a very important principle of high-quality healthcare.
Remember, the average employee may spend two hours a year in their physician’s office but may spend 2,000 hours a year at your workplace. You have a remarkable opportunity to help them.

Here are 7 Steps you can take to put Choosing Wisely to work in your business. It will benefit your employees—and your pocketbook.

1. Begin with the Five Questions.

Start with the Five Questions posters. Here’s the link. Consumer Reports can put your logo on this piece if you are interested. Please contact us or Dom Lorusso at Consumer Reports for assistance. Distribute the Five Questions through your email system and put posters up in your break rooms, human resources departments and other places visible to your employees. Create interest in the whole topic of being a better consumer of healthcare.

You can also download or link to Consumer Reports 30-second animated video on how to talk to your doctor. Here’s the link.

2. Be sure the executives in your company are on board.

Empowering employee consumerism is a culture change for many companies. Not having leadership on board may torpedo your efforts. John Kotter’s classic landmark publication about Leading Change can show you this and other potholes in the road to culture change in any transformational project.

3. Help your company learn what Choosing Wisely has to offer.

Get your employees and their dependents familiar with the Choosing Wisely program and what it can offer them. Along with Choosing Wisely, Consumer Reports make a lot of other health information available through their Making Healthy Choices program.
They put together a message that you can easily send to your employees to jump start their interest in Making Healthy Choices and Choosing Wisely.

Additionally, read through a brief summary from Consumer Reports on techniques for employers to follow. Here is the link.

4. Help your employees and their dependents to be empowered as educated consumers.

Don’t be misled into thinking that only a highly educated workforce can become effective consumers of healthcare. Everyone can become their own health advocate, and the Choosing Wisely information put out by Consumer Reports in their publications, web resources and the Making Healthy Choices offerings is written at a level that most of your employees and dependents will understand. Much of the information is also available in Spanish.

You might have them start with the four short videos that talk about getting the right care at the right time, what care can be needless, and how to have a good conversation with physicians. Take advantage of enrollment and renewal periods to present these videos:

Health Care: Making Healthy Choices

5. Tailor the message to your demographics.

If you have a relatively young workforce, they will be much more interested in matters like wellness, pregnancy and childbirth and taking care of young children.

Here are some ideas for that demographic:

- Antibiotics for children with sore throat, cough or runny nose—when children need them
- Thinking of getting pregnant? 5 things to start now
- What to reject when you’re expecting – Please note, Consumer Reports can provide bulk free print copies of this report thanks to a grant from the National Business Group on Health.

Do you have an older population concerned about heart disease or cancer? Help them understand what’s good and what’s not. Even seemingly harmless screening tests done inappropriately can lead to harm, both physical and emotional:

- Ratings of screening tests for heart disease
- The cancer tests you need and those you don’t

You may have folks with hypertension, heart disease or diabetes whose drug bills are very high. They may benefit from better drug information:

- Ten ways to reduce your drug costs
- Best Drugs for Less – Please note, Consumer Reports can provide bulk free print copies of this report.

Start making the Consumer Reports Making Healthy Choices toolset available to your employees and dependents. The toolset has over 100 Choosing Wisely topics in very readable brochures as well as videos. You can promote the free iPhone app.

For employees without computer access or smartphones, consider a brochure rack in your HR, break or cafeteria areas. Make the documents easy to locate and provide Spanish versions if appropriate.

Integrate Choosing Wisely into your wellness offerings. Use health fairs, employee meetings, annual reviews and employee newsletters to get the message out. Provide links to Making Healthy Choices, especially the engaging videos, in your employee health benefits portal.
6. Loop back with your employees to measure how well the message is being received.

John Kotter’s respected work “Leading Change” stressed the need to over-communicate “by a factor of 10.” Changing people from “patients” to “informed consumers of healthcare” is a challenge and that change won’t happen overnight.

Going to the doctor with a pen, notepad and the Five Questions ready to go aren’t familiar behaviors. But as your employees and dependents learn to use the questions, they will leave the doctor’s office a lot better informed with their five answers.

Consider surveying employees three and six months after introducing Choosing Wisely. If you don’t have an established survey system, SurveyMonkey is simple and cheap. Use the survey questions not just to collect data on how well your employees understand Choosing Wisely but also as a teaching tool by using informative questions. For example:

Did you know that Consumer Reports, the non-profit, commercial-free organization that rates products also produces excellent information on helping you make better healthcare decisions and have better conversations with your doctor?

- Yes, I am familiar with Choosing Wisely.
- I have heard about it but am not familiar with it.
- I haven’t heard of it.
- I haven’t heard of it but would like to know more.

WellOK can help you construct an effective survey.

7. Use data to realign your message.

Data from your health insurer, TPA or even your providers can help you understand the impact of your campaign. For example, ask your primary care provider group for data on how often antibiotics are prescribed for ordinary upper respiratory and sinus infections, a condition that rarely needs antibiotics.

Ask your obstetric providers for data on how often births are induced before 39 weeks—a practice traditionally done for convenience but known to be risky for the baby.

As you find trends, you can realign your Choosing Wisely campaign to address needed changes. Your benefits consultant or WellOK can help you with data requests and analyses.

There’s research to show that physicians following the medical evidence in Choosing Wisely can reduce healthcare costs. Engaging your employees and their dependents can also make a difference in reducing unnecessary and potentially harmful care.

Learn more:

- Making Health Choices Toolset
- Choosing Wisely for Employers: Toolkit from National Business Coalition on Health (include a timeline map)
- Introductory Videos
- Contact Consumer Reports Health