

Practising Wisely at the HFHT



Ask Dr. Michael Pray, family physician, why he is spearheading the Hamilton Family Health Team's Practising Wisely committee, and the answer is simple: "We waste too many of our precious few health care resources."

The HFHT's Practising Wisely committee, made up of Dr. Pray, along with family physicians Dr. Robert Kerr and Dr. Monica De Benedetti (who is also our Lead Physician) condenses and disseminates information produced by Choosing Wisely Canada, an organization committed to reducing unnecessary medical tests and treatments in our country. Choosing Wisely Canada compiles and maintains lists of hundreds of recommendations from various medical professions to assist health care providers in determining whether they need to perform a test or treatment on a patient.

For example, the Canadian Association of Radiologists recommends that health care providers avoid ordering MRIs for a patients' lower back pain unless a red flag (i.e. an abscess, suspected infection, etc.) is present. In other words, patients and providers are asked to Choose (or Practise) Wisely — and only do tests or treatments that are shown to improve health and do more good than harm.

While the Choosing Wisely approach may seem obvious to some, there are many patients and health care providers that equate more tests and treatments with better care. However, evidence shows that there is a vast array of medical interventions that only benefit a very small number of patients with health problems or predisposed risk. For patients that are low-risk, a test or treatment may cause more harm than good, or at the very least have no impact at all.

For example, Dr. Pray no longer performs routine urine testing on pregnant women unless they are likely to have certain medical risk factors. Dr. Pray says, "Routine urine dip tests are one of the things I have been doing routinely for years and I was rarely doing anything with the results." So, he stopped ordering the tests for some patients. This has allowed him to have more time to spend talking to patients at their appointments, and fewer dollars are spent on testing supplies or on analyzing the results.

The HFHT Practising Wisely committee has held education sessions for HFHT providers and regularly emails evidence-based information that providers can easily use to make changes to their practice.

The committee also encourages health care providers to share information about Choosing Wisely with their patients — because they have a responsibility for their health care, too.

The HFHT Practising Wisely committee has received high praise from providers across the organization. We look forward to seeing how much our providers change the way they practice using this information.

