

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. Our guest today is David Ansley. He is a Senior Analyst in Health Product Development with Consumer Reports. Also, joining him is Bill Adams. Today we're going to call Bill a Patient Champion Activist. And we're here to talk about the Choosing Wisely Program. Thank you both for joining me this morning.

David Ansley: Thanks very much. It's great to be here.

Katie Johnson: The Choosing Wisely Initiative is something that our listeners may or may not be familiar with. I'd like to start with that as our framework. Tell us what it is, how it got started, and why.

David Ansley: The Choosing Wisely Initiative is a recognition that began with physicians nationally that an awful lot of the care that they provide, or that they're asked to provide is in reality not really necessary. If you measure it in dollars, it's perhaps 30% of the money that we spend nationwide on healthcare, is spent on tests and treatments that turn out by the evidence to not really have been necessary or to be duplicative or to carry more harms than benefits.

The physicians groups nationally, the specialists, decided to launch a campaign to urge conversations between doctors and patients about tests and treatments to make sure that your particular care really is called for in the situation.

Katie Johnson: Tell me how the initiation of this campaign included or brought in Consumer Reports.

David Ansley: The doctors recognized that they were good at doctors talking to doctors about the need to talk to patients, but that they didn't really have a pathway to communicate effectively with consumers nationwide. So the physicians contacted Consumer Reports and asked us whether we would lead the consumer arm of this program, whose goal is on our part, to bring consumers to the table, to bring consumers to that conversation, to let people know that patients and their families really are welcome to ask a few probing questions about the care they're being offered.

Katie Johnson: So Consumer Reports, I think many of us are familiar with looking to them when we're going to buy a car or some other more retail decision. How long have they been involved in healthcare, and is that where you've always worked?

David Ansley: Consumer Reports' first issue, more than 80 years ago, included healthcare. We've been covering it ever since. And we in fact, some of our most popular articles are about healthcare. We just completed one about whether you're taking too many pills. We've had a cover story about taking care of pain. We've had cover stories about taking care of your heart. Healthcare has always been part of our core mission, and so this project fits squarely in our set of goals.

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Katie Johnson: When we think about the scope of healthcare, procedures, tests, treatments, that we're encouraging patients to ask, "Is it really necessary?" There are literally hundreds of them. Do you have information on hundreds of topics, or do you try and focus on some key areas that you know will make a greater impact on the questions asked and the dollars saved and the outcomes improved?

David Ansley: That is a challenge because when 70 physician groups make their lists of things we really should talk about, it ends up adding up to 500 or so topics that they would like to reduce, procedures that they would like to reduce the use of. But on an individual basis, you're only in there for one or two or three things, so it is a challenge for us to focus this campaign.

We've done it in two ways. While we do have a website with 130 brochures on it, we urge people to do two things. One is to make a point of asking questions. Ask your physician briefly, during the course of your time with them, "Is this treatment really necessary? What are the risks? What might be the alternatives?" And one of my favorite questions is, "What would happen if I didn't do anything?" You may discover some really fascinating things.

For instance, some of the most important things you might discover are, you don't really need an antibiotic for the condition you have. If it's the flu, if it's a cold, if it's a sore throat, if it's a runny nose, it almost certainly will not be helped by antibiotics, and we'll all be helped if the doctor and the patient agree, you know, we really don't need antibiotics anymore for that kind of condition.

Katie Johnson: Antibiotics stewardship is a big one and has such far-reaching implications. I think the education around that must certainly be one of your focus areas.

David Ansley: Of course it is. It turns out of course, that it's a very important public health issue as well as a personal health issue. So many of those 130 topics are different situations in which you don't need antibiotics.

Katie Johnson: Let's talk about the resources that are available to patients. You mentioned a hundred and some topics that are available. How do they get their hands on those to help them ask those good questions?

David Ansley: What I'm going to ask you to do is go to a website that I'll give you the address for. It's consumerhealthchoices.org. That's the site that we've built that is our warehouse of 130 brochures in English and Spanish plus posters and wallet cards that can help you remember to ask the right questions. That's a site that's entirely free, and we are doing it out of our sense of mission to make sure this information gets into the public's hands.

Katie Johnson: That brings me to the Patient Champion Activist Project that is a newer initiative as part of this, and that brings you to town and brings Bill Adams into the picture. Tell us how that works, how Bill has been chosen, and maybe Bill can talk about what his role is.

David Ansley: Happy to talk about this program. It's something new we've just started. You know, Consumer Reports is really good at delivering information, and we are working now hard at figuring out how to actually affect culture change around some of these issues, how to make sure that people recognize that more care is not always better.

We have enlisted a small group so far of individuals around the country who represent us on this subject, and whom we hope will help take the message literally into their living rooms with their friends and family to talk about this as a cultural issue that needs to be addressed.

Katie Johnson: Bill, how did you end up in this role?

Bill Adams: I've been engaged with Choosing Wisely for a number of years, and one of the things that I've been particularly interested in is the whole cultural issue. You know, I grew up in a time when we believed that more of everything is better including healthcare. That more healthcare is better healthcare, and as I have gotten older, hopefully, I've gotten wiser. And Choosing Wisely asks questions or gives me the permission to ask questions that I think are incredibly important to me as a person, to me as a patient.

I got involved with Choosing Wisely to help spread the message about asking questions. The questions that Choosing Wisely has outlined, one of the really important ones for me is, "Do I really need this test or procedure?" That's a question that we can ask of ourselves, and we can also ask of our physicians and of our care providers. Do I really need this test or procedure? Or is there something else that I could be doing instead? Would it be better if I walked an extra five miles this week, or if I lost an extra 5-10 pounds, would I really need this test, or would I really need this pill?

My goal is to spread that information to my friends, my family, people that I come across just so that we can have that cultural shift, so that we can begin to ask the question, "Is more healthcare better healthcare? Do I really need this test or procedure? Is there a better way that I can do this?"

One of the other questions that I think is of growing importance is, "How much does this cost?" A lot of us are getting higher and higher deductibles in our insurance plans. If we begin to ask that question, "So what's this gonna cost?" Another important question for all of us.

Katie Johnson: How do you intend to take this message to your friends and family, and how far ... I think you said there are just a few of these Patient Champion Activists nationwide so far. What's the scope of your coverage?

Bill Adams: One of the things that the whole Choosing Wisely Patient Champion Program is doing is to train us about how to have small-group conversations. To gather our family, our friends, our neighbors, our community together in small settings, and to begin to think about these questions, begin to become knowledgeable about the questions that we can ask, or that we should ask. That we should ask of ourselves,

and we should ask of our physicians, should ask the people who are involved with our care.

To begin raising the awareness that there is a culturally ingrained belief that more healthcare is better healthcare and to understand how that has come about. To look at ways that we as individuals can be engaged in asking those questions of ourselves and our physicians and of our friends and neighbors. So it's a cultural shift away from that, asking these five important questions that Consumer Reports and Choosing Wisely has laid out for us.

Katie Johnson: I think these questions are extremely important. The initiative is as well. As we wrap up, David, any key takeaways you leave with our listeners this morning?

David Ansley: Just remember that more healthcare is not always better. You can probably think of some examples in your own life, and be prepared to ask your doctors some hard questions about that.

Katie Johnson: Listener might be asking, "Why in the world is Lake Region Healthcare promoting more healthcare is not better?" I have to just say, this certainly aligns with our mission that if we are going to improve the health of people in our community, we need to be very proactive about arming them with the tools that they need to live the healthiest at the most optimal level of their health. And in this changing time of healthcare, reserve the healthcare dollars that we do have for the people that are the sickest. So we certainly do encourage you to ask these questions, and together we will make our healthcare system stronger.

David and Bill, thank you so much for your time this morning and for the work that you're doing at Consumer Reports here at home in your own living room, among our community with the Choosing Wisely Campaign. We appreciate both of you and your time this morning.

David Ansley: Thanks for much for the opportunity.

Katie Johnson: David Ansley, Senior Analyst in the Health Product Development Department with Consumer Reports, and Bill Adams, Patient Champion Activist with the Choosing Wisely Campaign, my guests this morning on Apple a Day. David, Bill, and Katie remind you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.