

Project Title: Influence and Evidence: Understanding Consumer Choices in Preventive Care

Principal Investigator: Barry Saver, MD

Applicant Organization: University of Massachusetts Medical School

Funding Source: Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute

Grant period: 2012-2014

This project will study consumers' and Community Health Workers' reactions to comparative effectiveness research results suggesting actions other than simply obtaining a screening test – specifically, the recent United States Preventive Services Task force recommendations advising individual decisions about mammography for women aged 40-49, taking into consideration the rough balance between benefits and harms and a woman's personal values, and their draft recommendation against routine prostate cancer screening using the PSA test. Specifically, in Year 1 of this project, we will: (1) explore consumer experiences and attitudes about credibility and influence of information from a variety of sources, including health care providers, nonpartisan, evidence-focused organizations (e.g., the USPSTF), advocacy groups, traditional decision supports, and media sources, both online and traditional and (2) develop one or more brief, motivational interventions to inform consumers about the USPSTF's evidence-based recommendations related to 2 cancer screening tests – prostate-specific antigen testing and mammography for women aged 40-49. Furthermore, because community health workers (the same or very similar to promoters, patient navigators, etc.) are playing a growing role in helping patients, particularly vulnerable patients such as those with limited English proficiency, access health care but addressing nuanced and negative recommendations is not something they have traditionally undertaken, we will (3) explore Community Health Workers' understanding of and attitudes toward providing messages about cancer screening tests to patients other than purely positive, promotional messages. Building on this work, in Year 2 of the project we will evaluate the motivational interventions developed in Year 1 by: (1) assessing changes in behavioral intentions and screening test utilization among a sample of consumers receiving the brief interventions developed in Year 1 as compared to a group receiving a more traditional, evidence-focused decision aid and (2) evaluating how community health workers deliver messages that either encourage careful consideration of a testing decision (mammography) or recommend against testing (PSA screening).

This project addresses the mission of PCORI to help inform better, patient-centered choices among prevention strategies. We have chosen to study consumer reactions to two recent recommendations from the US Preventive Services Task Force that go against “conventional wisdom” by either recommending against obtaining a screening test or carefully considering the potential harms as well as benefits as they are felt to be in close balance. The project is based in the large body of cognitive research demonstrating that many people do not reach health decisions through careful weighing of pros and cons, but often through approaches that ignore or misinterpret factual information presented. We will explore factors and approaches that may help Americans make screening choices more consistent with the best currently available research results, even if those results may seem counterintuitive and develop and test interventions to assist this process. We will compare them to more traditional, evidence-focused decision aids. We will also examine whether and how community health workers are able to use such approaches to transmit more complex messages than simple advocacy and support to their clients.