

## Allied health workforce has major role to play in Choosing Wisely

New Zealand's 30,000-strong allied health workforce has a major role to play in promoting *Choosing Wisely*, says Harsh Vardhan, President, Tangata Tiriti of Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa.

Harsh is also Clinical Coordinator Occupational Therapist for Hutt Valley District Health Board's (DHB's) Child Development Service and one of two *Choosing Wisely* project managers at the DHB.

The *Choosing Wisely* campaign encourages health professionals to talk to patients about unnecessary tests, treatments and procedures; and patients to discuss with their health professional whether they really need a particular intervention.

Medical colleges and specialist societies have developed lists of recommendations of unnecessary tests, treatments and procedures for their area of practice to help health professionals start a conversation with their patients about what is appropriate and necessary.

There are now around 130 lists of [recommendations and resources](#), spanning a wide range of specialties, as well as a growing number of [patient resources](#) to help consumers make better health care choices.

Harsh told a recent workshop on *Choosing Wisely* implementation that he had his reservations about *Choosing Wisely* when it was first launched.

"I was concerned that it was just another cost saving measure and it took me a while to come on board. But, I learnt that *Choosing Wisely* looks at the human factors of health care, such as motivation, stress and resilience, which I could relate to as an occupational therapist, and that it focuses on better health outcomes and enhanced participation and quality of life for the patient."

Harsh says we are living in an era of providing cost effective, individualised patient care that is valued by consumers.

"Health care is not limited to one discipline or profession. It's about how we work as a complex, adaptive system and all the professions need to come together.

"There are around 30,000 allied health professionals in NZ. If that workforce joins the *Choosing Wisely* movement, it will mean better patient care as well as making the system more efficient."

One example of *Choosing Wisely* in practice at the DHB is the development of a decision-making tool to determine which children should undergo the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) – a semi-structured assessment of communication, social interaction and play.

"It's considered the gold standard for assessing autism, but it is a multi-disciplinary assessment involving a range of health and allied health professionals and needs multiple appointments over several weeks. It also takes several hours to assess the results and feed them back to the family.

“We are getting more and more referrals around autism and related issues and we were doing ADOS assessments for almost every referral. However, they weren’t always needed because we had enough relevant information from the child’s history and clinical observation.

“So, we developed a decision-making tool that clearly outlines when to do ADOS and when not to. This means families have fewer appointments and less anxiety waiting for the results and frees up the health and allied health professionals to do other work.”

The DHB’s ‘Reshaping the rules’ project encourages any member of staff to let the *Choosing Wisely* committee know if they think there is a rule – written or unwritten – which could be reshaped to improve patient care.

Another recent initiative is including *Choosing Wisely* information with every medical appointment patient’s referral acceptance letter. The DHB’s support of the campaign is explained and patients are encouraged to ask the four key *Choosing Wisely* questions:

- Do I really need this test or procedure?
- What are the risks?
- Are there simpler, safer options?
- What happens if I don’t do anything?

Harsh says having *Choosing Wisely* champions and well planned internal and external communications have played key roles in the campaign.

“We’ll also be using channels such as Māori and Pacific radio stations, local newspapers and face-to-face church meetings to engage our Māori and Pasifika population about Choosing Wisely.”