

Video conferencing could increase shared decision-making in hospice care

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Researchers at the University of Missouri have found that shared decision-making, although beneficial, could be enhanced in hospice care. Credit: MU Health / Justin Kelley

While there is vast research on shared decision-making between patients and providers, little research exists on how providers and family

caregivers reach mutual decisions—a dynamic that is prominent in hospice care, a type of medical care given to patients near the end of their lives. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that shared decision-making, although beneficial, could be enhanced in hospice care. The researchers recommend that health care workers employ measures such as video conferencing to help increase the likelihood of shared decision-making between patients and family caregivers.

"Patients in [hospice care](#) generally have less than six months to live, and some very important decisions need to be made during this time," said Debra Parker-Oliver, PhD, professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the MU School of Medicine and lead researcher on the study. "Shared decision-making is critical to patient-centered care because it helps ensure [patients](#) will receive care that is in line with their preferences and values. It is a process where decisions are jointly made between providers and patients, or in most hospice care cases, family caregivers."

Parker-Oliver and Karla Washington, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the MU School of Medicine and co-researcher on the study, reviewed video recordings of hospice team meetings that involved family caregivers. They found that shared decision-making occurs infrequently in hospice team meetings that involve family caregivers due to barriers such as time constraints, a lack of communication skills and unaddressed emotional needs. The researchers said hospice providers who want to include family caregivers in the [decision-making process](#) should consider using [video conferencing](#) to facilitate caregivers' participation.

"The quality of team meetings is enhanced when you have a visual image," Washington said. "It facilitates things like turn-taking and helps ensure meeting attendees are listening and engaged in the discussion."

Although researchers found that including family caregivers through video conferencing is a useful tool for shared decision-making, they say it does not guarantee shared decision-making will occur.

"Although shared decision-making is facilitated by having family caregivers participate in team meetings through video or Web conferencing, that alone does not mean shared decision-making will actually take place," Parker-Oliver said. "Specific steps need to be taken to ensure [family caregivers](#) participate in the decision-making process."

The study shows the need for more research on shared decision-making in hospice care, and the researchers believe that through more research, they can help hospice teams become more effective and engaged in more shared decision-making with patients' families.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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