

Topic: What is appropriate care? From clinical effectiveness to a more integrated understanding

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Background

While healthcare systems and providers alike strive to provide appropriate care that improves patient health and quality of life, the term “appropriate care” is currently a patchwork concept with no universal scope or meaning. A more complete picture of appropriate care could help inform an integrated concept that could guide healthcare delivery.

Methodology

We performed a systematic review of how the term appropriate care is defined and used in English language peer-reviewed articles that were published between 2011 and 2014. We systematically compared how articles characterized appropriate care and its scope of applicability according to descriptive and ethical elements (Table 1). Appropriate care elements were compared using frequency counts.

Table 1: Categorization Domains

<i>Descriptive elements</i>	<i>Ethical elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determinant of appropriate care • Health care setting • Type of care • Perspective of care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical effectiveness • Patient preferences and values • Equity • Cost • Resource use

Results

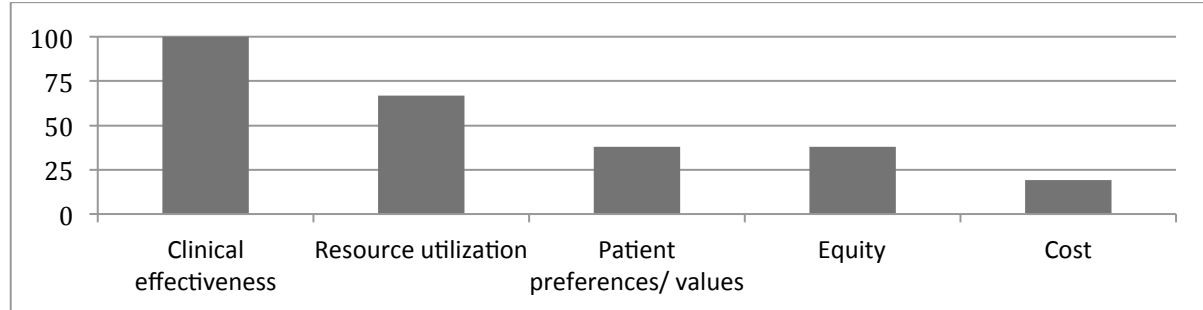
Through a review of the literature, we identified certain patterns in the use and understanding of appropriate care (Table 2, Figure 1).

Table 2. Descriptive elements

<i>Determinants</i>	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Type of care</i>	<i>Perspective</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical outcomes • Guideline adherence • Physician discretion • Expert opinion • Observed variation • Patient acceptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertiary • Primary • Other • Integrated • Secondary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condition-specific • Procedure-specific • Single episode • Long-term management • Generalizable • Prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HC professional • Health care system • Public health • Institution • Patient • Scientific evidence



Figure 1. Presence of ethical themes in literature on appropriate care



Conclusions

- No universal understanding of appropriate care yet exists, but clinical effectiveness is considered a vital element
- Equity, cost, and respect for patient values are less considered
- Overall use of clinical outcomes and guidelines to guide appropriate care delivery represents a reliance on evidence-based measures
- Outcomes and guidelines may be suitable for clear-cut acute care
- Other factors, such as physician discretion, patient preference, and cost, may play larger roles in complex, long-term, and/ or evidence poor cases

Discussion Questions

- How would you define appropriate care?
- What determines whether care is appropriate?
- What considerations/ elements should be included in an integrated understanding of appropriate care?
- What perspectives should be considered?
- What should the scope of a concept of appropriate care be? How specific or broad?
- How could an integrated concept/ framework for appropriate care be implemented in practice, (e.g., guidelines, performance measures, internal audit, etc.)?
- In what settings and circumstances would a framework be most useful?
- What is the patient's responsibility to ensure appropriate care? How can he/she be empowered to fulfill this responsibility?

Further reading

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