

Patients' Perception of Risk

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The accurate perception of risk is critical for patients to make rational decisions about health care interventions. Health professionals attempt to aid this process by providing patients with information about the likelihood of future outcomes. However, there are large and important differences between the risks and benefits of treatment perceived by patients and those perceived by doctors. This talk discusses some of the factors that influence patients' (mis)perceptions of risk including low levels of knowledge about anatomy, confirmation bias, motivated denial, the "better than average" effect, numeracy difficulties and the way risk material is processed. These issues make the presentation and comprehension of risk information difficult for doctors and provide considerable opportunity for miscommunication in clinical conversations. Unfortunately, the talk provides no magic answers. Furthermore, there is considerable (greater than 90%) risk that those listening are likely to be left feeling despondent and miserable.