Using a Personalized Decision Aid When Considering Colon Cancer Screening - Older Veterans’ Experiences -
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What did we do?
Veteran participants, aged 70-75 were given a Decision Aid booklet describing how colon cancer screening may be different later in life. (see fig. 1)
- The booklet explained how the benefits and risks of screening change as people age.
- Inside was a personalized graph estimating the benefits and risks of screening based on the Veteran’s age; gender; ethnicity; prior screening history; and other health problems. (see fig. 2)
- We interviewed 30 of those Veterans by phone to ask about their experience with the Decision Aid and asked questions like…
  • How important is screening to you?
  • Did you learn anything new?
  • Before reading the booklet, have you considered your age and/or health when thinking about screening for colon cancer?
* Interviews lasted about 30 minutes and were audio-recorded.

Why did we do it?
Because every individual is different
Current guidelines recommend screening in ALL patients aged 50-75, regardless of whether they will benefit from screening or would prefer not to get screened. But age alone is not enough for making a high-quality screening decision.

What did we learn?
Providing Veterans with information about Colon Cancer and screening, plus their personal risks and benefits can influence screening preferences including stopping screening.
- Previous experiences, established preferences, risk-avoidance may affect Decision Aid influence.
- “Colon cancer grows slowly” was new information to many.
- Veterans understood that as their age increases and life expectancy decreases, the benefit (catching cancer early) of screening is reduced.
- More Veterans preferred stool testing over colonoscopy citing it as noninvasive and thereby less likely to cause harm.
- Veterans for whom the DA had no influence had other health problems that they prioritized over CRC decision-making and/or had strong existing screening preferences.
- See what Veterans had to say below!

“Why is colon cancer screening different as I get older?”
The balance of screening benefits and harms changes as people get older.
"The graph was showing the health risk factors, giving mine especially. Gave me a personal one against their general one"  

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“I was of the opinion that I needed to be screened. It gives me pause to think of do I want to or do I need to, and I do, but like I said I probably going forward, given my health conditions, I probably would not do it again, but I will do it now.”

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