

Slow Medicine and Choosing Wisely: a synergistic alliance

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ABSTRACT | INTRODUCTION: Choosing Wisely® is an initiative of the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation to help physicians and patients engage in conversations about the overuse of tests and procedures and support physician efforts to help patients make smart and effective care choices. Choosing Wisely campaigns are now active and present in 25 countries around the world, on five continents. Italy is the only country where a Choosing Wisely campaign was launched, and it is currently steered by a Nationwide association (Slow Medicine), creating a synergistic alliance. The Slow Medicine Association was founded in 2011 when a group of health professionals and citizens shared a new paradigm of values, methodology, and interventions and decided to establish an association with the mission of working for a health system driven by ethics and quality principles. Three keywords summarize the philosophy of Slow Medicine: *measured* because it acts with moderation, gradualness, and without waste; *respectful* because it is attentive to the dignity of individuals recognizing their values; and *equitable* because it is committed to ensuring appropriate care based on the best available evidence. Slow Medicine allowed the spread of Choosing Wisely in Italy involving several professional societies and participating at the National meetings of the Societies as well as numerous other meetings, in which the mission of the Association is combined with the principle of the 'do not' recommendations. Numerous other initiatives were carried out, and new projects were planned in synergy with Choosing Wisely.

KEYWORDS: Choosing Wisely. Slow Medicine. Medical overuse. Low-value care. Inappropriate prescribing. Deprescription.

The Slow Medicine Association was founded in Italy in 2011 when a group of health professionals and citizens shared a new paradigm of values, methodology, and interventions and decided to establish an association with the mission of working for a health system driven by ethics and quality principles.¹

Slow Medicine was born as a movement of ideas to bring the process of care back into the realm of appropriateness, recognizing and supporting its value within a relationship of listening, dialogue, and sharing decisions with the patients. Medicine is soaked with inappropriateness, wastes, conflicts of interest, and many clichés induce professionals and patients to consume more and more healthcare services in the illusion that it is always better to do more for improving health. Moreover, the dominant reductionist cultural model, on which the concept of health and disease is based today, considers man as a machine, investigated by a growing number of specialists, particularly interested in the pathophysiological mechanisms of diseases. The interest is mainly focused on technologies, while the person along with the relations with his/her family and the social environment are completely neglected.

Three keywords summarize the philosophy of Slow Medicine: measured, because it acts with moderation, gradualness, and without waste; respectful because it is attentive to the dignity of individuals recognizing their values; and equitable because it is committed to ensuring appropriate care based on the best available evidence for all.

Figure 1. The Slow Medicine manifesto

The Slow Medicine manifesto graphic is a vertical document with a light blue background. At the top, it features the 'Slow Medicine' logo, which consists of two stylized snails, one blue and one green, facing each other. Below the logo, the title 'Measured Respectful Equitable' is written in a large, blue, serif font. The document is divided into three main sections, each separated by a horizontal dashed line. Each section has a small icon of two snails (one blue, one green) to the left of the section title. The first section is titled 'MEASURED' and discusses the concept of doing more without necessarily doing better, emphasizing moderation and respect for the environment. The second section is titled 'RESPECTFUL' and focuses on recognizing and respecting individual values and desires. The third section is titled 'EQUITABLE' and promotes appropriate and good quality care for all, addressing inequality and access to healthcare. At the bottom of the graphic, there is contact information for Slow Medicine, including an address in Torino, Italy, an email address, and a website URL.

Slow Medicine

Measured Respectful Equitable

MEASURED

DOING MORE DOES NOT MEAN DOING BETTER

The dissemination and use of new treatments and new diagnostic procedures is not always accompanied by greater benefits for patients. Economic interests, as well as cultural and social pressures, encourage both an excessive use of health services and an expansion of people's expectations beyond what is realistic, what the health system is able to deliver. Not enough attention is paid to the environment or the integrity of the ecosystem.

A measured medicine involves the ability to act with moderation, gradually, and essentially, and uses the resources available appropriately and without waste. A measured medicine respects the environment and protects the ecosystem.

Slow Medicine recognizes that doing more does not mean doing better.

RESPECTFUL

PEOPLE'S VALUES, EXPECTATIONS AND DESIRES ARE DIFFERENT AND INVOLABLE

Everyone has the right to be what he/she is, and to express what he/she thinks.

A respectful medicine is able to acknowledge and take into consideration the values, preferences and orientations of a person in every moment of life.

Health professionals act with care, balance and empathy.

Slow Medicine recognizes that people's values, expectations and desires are different and inviolable.

EQUITABLE

APPROPRIATE AND GOOD QUALITY CARE FOR ALL

An equitable medicine promotes appropriate care, which is both adequate to the person and circumstances, and proven to be effective and acceptable for both patients and health professionals.

An equitable medicine opposes inequality and facilitates access to health and social services. It overcomes the fragmentation of care, and encourages the exchange of information and knowledge among professionals, according to a systemic approach.

Slow Medicine promotes appropriate and good quality care for all.

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The expression Slow Medicine was chosen to indicate the ideal and collaborative affinity with Slow Food, which for decades had been promoting in Italy and around the world sustainable agriculture and the availability for all human beings of good, clean, and fair food. It should be noted that the term "slow" does not mean fighting for a sluggish, lazy, relaxed medicine because we all perfectly know that medicine several times should be aggressive, crucial, capable of not giving up. On the contrary, according to our mission, the word "slow" recalls the concept of thoughtful, considered medicine, which allows time for thought, reasoning, and judgment.

Slow Medicine aims to counteract the most frequent problems related to how healthcare practices are provided (overuse and underuse of tests and treatments, overdiagnosis, disease mongering, conflicts of interest, dehumanization of care, excessive or inaccurate information, technological driven decisions) by integrating evidence-based Medicine with medical humanities. We are aware of the limits of Medicine and that health depends on the interaction between multiple elements: biological, psychological, spiritual, social, and environmental. Health is the best possible balance among these elements at a given time and in each context; now one prevails, now the other, but they are all always present and interacting. This dynamic balance, never definitive or immobile, is the framework of living systems.

Given the multiplicity of the determinants of human health, since its origin in Slow Medicine there was the belief that only a systemic approach allows a correct vision of health. The new values paradigm ultimately combined the deontological principles of the health professions, Max Weber's ethics of responsibility, and Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi's systemic vision of life.

The systemic approach adopted by Slow Medicine teaches us that health and disease are complex phenomena, and a person's life is more than the sum of the chemical reactions that occur in its cells. New and unexpected properties appear at different levels of complexity, such as thinking, emotions, pleasure, and health. These properties are not detectable in the individual elements and can only be studied using analysis methods and knowledge belonging to other domains of knowledge, such as human sciences: philosophy, anthropology, psychology, ethics, art, etc.

The associative practice was a "network of ideas in motion" and "agora" in which people freely express and debate their opinions and collaborate, without personal gain or conflict of interest, to spread knowledge and experiences consistent with the new paradigm.

Slow Medicine created several initiatives thanks to the voluntary work of its members, organized seven national conferences, participated in numerous conferences and meetings in Italy and abroad, and created a dedicated website, an institutional Facebook page, a specific Facebook discussion group, and a monthly newsletter. Recently it designed and implemented an Executive Master on Slow Medicine and Choosing Wisely at the Training Center for health workers of the Sicilian Region (CEFPAS) and created an online course for CME credits on the same subject on behalf of the Papardo Hospital in Messina. Several articles in national and international journals²⁻⁶ and two textbooks⁷⁻⁸ have been published to explain the philosophy of the Association.

In 2015, during its fifth national congress, Slow Medicine launched the national campaign #buongiornioisono, inspired by the #hallomynameis initiative⁹ launched in the United Kingdom by Kate Granger, a doctor who had cancer. After her experience in the hospital, she aimed to remind all health professionals of the importance of presenting themselves with their name and role when meeting a patient as the first step in establishing a relationship of trust.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Slow Medicine organized some web meetings with an audience of hundreds of people, members and sympathizers of the Association.

Choosing Wisely

Choosing Wisely was the first and most challenging campaign of Slow Medicine, launched in 2012 according to our first commitment: a measured medicine. Initially, its name was "Doing more does not mean doing better" and subsequently also "Choosing Wisely Italy."¹⁰ A network of professional societies and associations was created, committed to identifying and publicizing recommendations on tests, treatments, and procedures at risk of

inappropriateness in Italy, potentially unnecessary and sometimes harmful, which professionals and their patients should discuss to reach shared and informed choices.

The campaign took its cue from the U.S. one "Choosing Wisely®," promoted in the same year by the Foundation of American Internists ("ABIM Foundation") and the citizens' association "Consumer report."^{11,12} In the following years, campaigns with similar aims were also launched in other countries of the world, and the Choosing Wisely International network was established, coordinated by Canada. International meetings have been organized every year since 2014 in which Slow Medicine has always participated. Choosing Wisely campaigns are now present and active in 25 countries around the world, on five continents.¹³⁻¹⁴

The Italian campaign has important partners including the Federazione Nazionale degli Ordini dei Medici Chirurghi e Odontoiatri (the Italian Federation of the Colleges of Physicians) and the Federazione Nazionale degli Ordini delle Professioni Infermieristiche (the Italian Federation of the College of Registered Nurses) as well as the consumer association Altroconsumo.

To date, the professional societies and associations of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and physiotherapists who have joined the Italian network are 50. They produced 265 recommendations collected on the website and in the app Choosing Wisely Italy, which easily allows reaching all the recommendations in Italian and English. Recently they became part of the "Best Practices" of the National System of Guidelines of the Italian National Institute of Health and the international decision support tool "Dynamed."

Among the recommendations, 107 (40%) concern tests (imaging, laboratory, cardiological, other), 97 (37%) drugs and other treatments, 61 (23%) relate to other procedures about healthcare, medical education, and primary prevention.

The collaboration with Altroconsumo has made it possible to develop about 30 information sheets for the public drawn up from the recommendations in collaboration with professionals. They can facilitate conversations between health professionals and patients and shared decision-making.

A Choosing Wisely movement of students and physicians in training was also launched in Italy after that of Canada and other countries, aiming to introduce the contents of Slow Medicine and Choosing Wisely in the University and post-graduate training curricula. Five recommendations from SISM (Italian Secretariat for Medical Students) were published in May 2020.

Now, the biggest challenge is the dissemination and implementation of the recommendations, taking into account the barriers that clinicians and health systems can face when implementing change.¹⁵

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Italy's health care system faces increased challenges of limited resources, reduced capacity, and reduced services overall, with worsening clinical outcomes and an increase in health inequalities. In this situation, it is an ethical imperative to reduce low-value care and to ensure high-quality care is available to everyone, with priority criteria defined on a clinical basis.¹⁶

Slow Medicine and Choosing Wisely

Out of the 25 Countries where a Choosing Wisely campaign is operative, Italy is the only one where it was launched, and it is currently steered by the Slow Medicine Association, creating a synergistic alliance.

The Nationwide organization of Slow Medicine allowed the spread of Choosing Wisely in Italy involving several professional societies and participating at the National meetings of the Societies as well as numerous other meetings, in which the mission of the Association is presented combined with the principle of the 'do not' recommendations. Face-to-face and remote training courses have already been carried out and will be in the near future. In Italy, the Choosing Wisely movement is not confined to releasing and implementing top 5 lists. However, it is part of a conceptual paradigm of a measured, respectful, and equitable medicine not affected by commercial interests and by technological pressures within the boundaries of Evidence-based medicine.

Primary prevention and correct lifestyle habits, such as attention to the environment and the ecosystem,

are of great importance from our most recent point of view, especially after the pandemic experience.

Considering that human health, animal health, and ecosystem health are inextricably linked, the assumption of responsibility of professionals must expand in line with the One Health approach.¹⁷

Consequently, Slow Medicine has recently launched the Montagna Slow (Slow Mountain) project for a measured, respectful, and equitable approach to the Mountains, which promotes health and well-being for all and protects the environment and biodiversity.

Furthermore, in our time, when the impact of climate change is increasingly evident, with extreme events becoming more intense and frequent, we also consider it necessary for doctors and other health professionals to be aware of the consequences of health practices on the ecosystem, as further motivation for the reduction of those that are not necessary¹⁸: in the Choosing Wisely Italy campaign, there will be attention to the impact on the environment of tests, treatments, and procedures, towards a Green Choosing Wisely.

After the successful experience with the #buongiornoio sono campaign of 2015, aimed to remind all health professionals of the importance of presenting themselves with their name and role when meeting a patient, as the first step in establishing a relationship of trust, the current Slow Medicine's agenda also contains a new initiative aimed at promoting people's trust in scientific evidence and health institutions, particularly threatened by the current pandemic. To make a contribution in this sense and to initiate a first concrete action, it was decided to join with conviction and enthusiasm the "Building Trust" initiative presented a few months ago by the US foundation of internists (the ABIM Foundation)¹⁹, aimed at recovering the trust of citizens in health institutions, science, and professional competence.

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Author contributions

Bobbio M, Venero S, Colimberti D, and Gardini A equally contributed to discussing the contents and message of the article, writing and revising the final version of the manuscript.

Competing interests

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