How do patients from eastern and western Germany compare with regard to their preferences for shared decision making?

Increasing emphasis is being placed on involving patients in decisions concerning their health. This shift towards more patient engagement by health professionals and towards more desire by patients for participation may be partly based on socio-political factors. To compare the preferences for shared decision making of patients from eastern and western Germany we analysed five patient samples (n = 2318) (general practice patients and schizophrenia patients from eastern and western Germany). Patients' role preferences for shared decisions were measured using the decision-making subscale of the Autonomy Preference Index. Patients resident in eastern Germany expressed lower preferences for shared decision making than patients in western Germany. This was true after controlling for socio-demographic variables and for patient group. The cultural imprint (e.g. western vs. former communist society) seems to have a significant influence on patients' expectations and behaviour in the medical encounter. Health services providers need to be aware that health attitudes within the same health system might vary for historical and cultural reasons. The engagement of patients in medical decisions might not be susceptible to a 'one size fits all' approach; doctors should instead aim to accommodate the individual.
patient's desire for autonomy.

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