In general, the prevalence of diseases is low in primary care. Therefore, the positive predictive value of diagnostic tests is lower than in hospitals where patients are highly selected. In addition, the patients present with milder forms of disease; and many diseases might hide behind the initial symptom(s). These facts lead to diagnostic uncertainty which is somewhat inherent to general practice. This narrative review discusses different sources of and reasons for uncertainty and strategies to deal with it in the context of the current literature. Fear of uncertainty correlates with higher diagnostic activities. The attitude towards uncertainty correlates with the choice of medical speciality by vocational trainees or medical students. An intolerance of uncertainty, which still increases as medicine is making steady progress, might partly explain the growing shortage of general practitioners. The bio-psycho-social context appears to be important to diagnostic decision-making. The effect of intuition and heuristics are investigated by cognitive psychologists. It is still unclear whether these aspects are prone to bias or useful, which might depend on the context of medical decisions. Good communication is of great importance to share uncertainty with the patients in a transparent way and to alleviate shared decision-making. Dealing with uncertainty should be seen as an important core component of general practice and needs to be investigated in more detail to improve...
the respective medical decisions.