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After gaining a BSc and PhD in psychology from University College London, I joined the Applied Psychology Unit (APU) in Cambridge, UK, funded by the Medical Research Council. After working there as a non-clinical scientist for over three decades, studying how members of the public use information and how the ease of use is influenced by design factors, I moved to Cardiff University when the APU was closed, and have continued to research and teach in Cardiff for over a decade.

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What if ...? Designing tools to help the public make difficult decisions about health care

Abstract:

Decision support software usually gives advice. In contrast Decision Explorers do not give advice but show the consequences of alternative decisions. This is potentially beneficial when healthcare decisions involve weighing the risks, convenience and costs of different actions because these weightings which vary across individuals at the same medical choice point. Decision Explorers for choices relating to future health risks, for example medical screening or when encouraging life-style changes, raise numerous design issues. The target audience is the general public, many of whom may not feel comfortable with traditional statistical presentations such as tables and graphs. The contribution of animation to different statistical representations of risk are discussed with reference to their suitability for audiences of different ages. Evidence is presented that preferred interface styles can vary with age, and that including optional voice output enhances public accessibility. The contributions of impersonal statistics and personal 'life stories' (e.g. via video clips) are considered, together with the usefulness of software tools to help people track how their decisions change as they accumulate evidence. It is concluded that Decision Explorers, if appropriately designed, can help members of the public make informed choices when facing difficult decisions about their health care.