

Decision Processes Colloquium

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Health by Default

I will present several studies that examine how to harness principles of behavioral economics to encourage healthy behavior. Several studies employed the default effect to encourage healthy behavior. In one study employees or patients were informed that flu shots were available and they could make an appointment or they were informed that they had been scheduled for a flu shot appointment that they could cancel it if they wished. Vaccination rates were higher in the latter group. A parallel study compared pharmacy patients who have been randomized to automatic or manual refills for their maintenance medications. With automatic refills, the default is to have the medication refilled a month after the previous refill, unless the patient opts out. With manual refills, the default is that the medication will not be refilled, unless the patient explicitly requests a refill. Patients with automatic refills picked up their prescriptions at shorter intervals. Another study compared cappuccino orders in a cafe that uses whole milk as the default vs. in one that uses 2% milk as the default. A final default effect study compares shoppers who bought a coffee cup when it came filled with chocolate candy (with the option to switch to fruit and nut mix) vs. when it came filled with fruit and nut mix (with the option to switch to chocolate candy). I will also present several other studies that employ behavioral economic principles to influence vaccination behavior.