

# Choosing Wisely: Rational Test Ordering

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Jules Willcocks chats to Deborah Leach and Paul Buntine about [Choosing Wisely](#), how to reduce unnecessary test ordering and clinical decision making in healthcare.

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## About Associate Professor Deborah Leach

Deborah Leach has been the Clinical Director for the Emergency Department, Box Hill Hospital for 21 years and was the Eastern Health Director of Emergency Services from 2003 to 2009. Deborah has been the Director of Medical Student Programs, Eastern Health Clinical School (Monash and Deakin University students) since August 2018.

She has also held roles within the [Australasian College of Emergency Medicine](#), including being part of the examination committees, is also an ex-college examiner (since 2000, appointed senior examiner 2010). Deborah's interests include leadership development, [teamwork](#), No [Unnecessary Tests](#), Quality & Redesign, Patient centred care and teaching.

## About Dr Paul Buntine

Paul Buntine is the Director of Emergency Medicine Research for Eastern Health in Melbourne and a Clinical FACEM at Box Hill Hospital, Victoria. He has a particular interest in rational medical test ordering and reducing low value interventions and is the Clinical Lead for the Eastern Health No Unnecessary Tests project. More often than not, he will ask his junior doctors and registrars to justify why they are ordering a test or performing a particular intervention, rather than why they are not planning to do it.

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## Choosing Wisely: Rational Test Ordering

*With Dr Deborah Leach, Clinical Director of the Emergency Department Box Hill Hospital, Eastern Health Director of Emergency Services 2003-2009. Director of Medical Student Program, Eastern Clinical School, Monash & Deakin University and Dr Paul Buntine, Director of Emergency Medicine Research for Eastern Health in Melbourne & Clinical FACEM at Box Hill Hospital, Victoria, Australia*

## Introduction

Next time you order a blood test or a scan, ask yourself, is that test really necessary? Easy access to tests has led to increased test ordering, which can not only be wasteful but also harmful to the patient. Jules Willcocks speaks to Deborah Leach and Paul Buntine about the “no unnecessary test” project and how junior doctors can implement change by “Choosing Wisely.”

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### 1. What are the problems associated with ordering lots of tests?

- Tests are expensive
- Incidental findings can lead to more tests and create anxiety for patients
- Risks associated with the tests themselves
- Can be related to lack of confidence where doctors don't trust their clinical judgment and second guess themselves
- Easy for doctors to mistakenly think that they can make better decisions and keep patients safer with more information by ordering lots of tests

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### 2. What is your advice to junior doctors regarding test ordering?

- It may be tricky for junior doctors to deal with situations where consultants ask for a lot of tests. In these situations, keep challenging and asking them why they want that test
- Remind yourself that often you know the patient the best

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### 3. What was involved in the “no unnecessary test” project?

- Observational research and audit of areas where tests are overly ordered
- Based on the results, multimodal behavioural change was implemented through education, publicity, and involving clinical champions especially junior doctors
- Results from the project showed that significant amount of money can be saved which can be spent in other areas of need in hospitals, such as hiring more junior doctors
- Challenging areas included resistance to change from senior doctors as well as change in staff due to rotating doctors

#### 4. What are the 5 questions of “Choosing Wisely” that we should encourage patients to ask?

- Do I really need this test/treatment/procedure?
- What are the risks?
- Are there simpler, safer options?
- What happens if I don't do anything?
- What are the costs?

#### 5. What are some suggestions for junior doctors if they want to research into this area or implement change to their hospital?

- Junior doctors are very effective change agents
- Become involved in audits
- Important to have “clinical champions” and nurture those junior doctors
- Seek out the seniors in the organisation who can influence change and seek support from the organisation

#### Take home messages

- When ordering tests, ask yourself - “what are you trying to answer with this test?”
- Taking a good history is key! Take a compassionate, empathetic history where you listen carefully to what the patient is trying to tell you. Not a long history, but the “right” history to understand your patient as a person
- Can be a huge daunting area and knowing where to start, but you can become an agent of change! Find an area that interests you, an area where there is an issue and start with an audit

#### Useful Resources

- Choosing Wisely: <https://www.choosingwisely.org.au/what-is-choosing-wisely-australia>

## Related Blogs

- [Avoiding harms of too much medicine: lessons for the junior doctor](#)

- My top 5 Choosing Wisely practices for junior doctors
- The 11th Commandment - Thou Shalt Not Order Inappropriate Investigations

**Tags:** #blood testing,#ChoosingWisely,#inappropriate investigations,  
#junior doctors,#ordering tests,#pathology,#patient centred care