Informed consent: Understanding the risks and benefits of treatment

What is informed consent?

Informed consent refers to a patient's right to fully understand and agree to a medical procedure or treatment before it takes place. Medical professionals usually obtain informed consent in writing, after the patient is given information that outlines the risks and benefits of their procedure.

What information is my clinician required to share?

For patients to make an "informed choice" about their treatment, clinicians must disclose:

- **Your diagnosis**.

  A treating medical professional is required to tell you the name and nature of your condition.

- **The risks and benefits of the proposed treatment plan.**

  All treatment options that your clinician wants you to consider must be fully explained. Your clinician must explain the potential risks and benefits associated with each treatment, how likely the risks are to happen, the potential benefits of the treatment and how likely it is to be successful.

- **Alternative options.**

  Your clinician may have a recommended treatment plan for you. However, they must present you with all medically recognized alternatives. Patients also have the right to refuse or delay treatment, but your clinician must ensure that you understand the risks and benefits of inaction.

When are patients NOT asked to give informed consent?

- In the event of an emergency or if a patient is incapacitated, the clinician will identify an appropriate surrogate to make decisions on their behalf.
- If the patient is a minor, a parent or legal guardian will be responsible for giving informed consent on their behalf.

Sources

1. Mayo Clinic Proceedings
2. National Library of Medicine
3. American Cancer Society
4. Cleveland Clinic and their FAQs
5. AMA Code of Medical Ethics

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