



# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF **INFORMED CONSENT**



## 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.

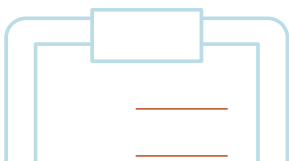
Typically, medical professionals obtain informed consent in writing, with risks and benefits of the procedure noted at length in a packet of documents. The patient's signature on these documents – whether they read them or not – attests that they have received and understood the information and wish to proceed with the recommended treatment.

For patients to make an “informed choice” about their treatment, healthcare professionals must disclose:

**Your diagnosis.** A treating medical professional must tell you the name and nature of your condition.

**The proposed treatment plan.** Your treatment options must be fully explained. Patients have the right to seek recommendations or opinions from different specialists before making a decision.

**The risks and benefits of the plan.** When discussing treatment options, your clinician must explain what the potential risks of treatment are, how likely those risks are to happen, the potential benefits of the treatment and how likely it is to be successful. “Remote risks” (risks considered to be common knowledge or related to factors that the provider was unaware of) do not need to be addressed.



**Alternative options.** Your clinician may have a clear recommendation for your treatment plan in mind. However, they must discuss all other medically recognized alternatives for you to consider. Your clinician must also disclose any risks or benefits associated with this alternative treatment plan.

**What happens if no action is taken.** Patients have the right to refuse or delay treatment. However, your treating clinician must ensure that you understand the risks and benefits associated with inaction.

## HOW WILL MY CLINICIAN CONVEY THIS INFORMATION?

Medical professionals have various tools to communicate treatment options. Clinicians can use verbal communication, pamphlets, infographics, and videos. It is crucial for clinicians to ensure that their language is clear and easy for patients to understand. If a language barrier exists between the patient and the clinician, federal laws and the standard of care require clinicians to take reasonable steps to overcome the language barrier. This may include hiring qualified translators or utilizing auxiliary aids or services.

## WHEN ARE PATIENTS NOT ASKED TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT?

- When you are incapacitated.
- When it's an emergency.
- If the patient is a child, the patient's parent or legal guardian will be responsible for giving informed consent.

# SMARTER PATIENTS

One of the key ways healthcare consumers can take a more active role in their overall care is by educating themselves on some of the important topics surrounding the current healthcare climate. The Board has created an educational series that covers a variety of subjects that patients might encounter.

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Learn more at:

[ncmedboard.org/smartpatients](https://ncmedboard.org/smartpatients)