INFORMED CONSENT, IS IT ENOUGH?

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ABSTRACT

It was investigated to determine how effectively an individual would retain and recall information delivered to them approximately 6 months prior to cataract surgery. The information was delivered as part of the informed consent by the Doctor, and the legal consent was signed just prior to the cataract surgery starting. The questionnaire was given to one group of patients before the surgery, and the same questionnaire given to another group after the surgery was complete. Although information was delivered with intention to have informed consent, patients did not completely understand the procedure they were having. Ways to deliver information were researched and have been outlined in the presentation.

Keywords: informed, consent, retention, communication

INFORMED CONSENT, IS IT ENOUGH?

The process of informed consent is widely accepted as basic standard of care for any significant medical procedure and is based upon the ethical and legal principle of autonomy.

Central to the principle of autonomy is the role of the patient as the key decision-maker. The process of informed consent is one that involves explanation of the procedure and disclosure of potential risks and proposed benefits. It is based on the expectation that patients assimilate and weigh information against their own value structures and health expectations and then decide for or against undergoing the procedure.[1]

Research Project

With Christopher Hansen MD PGY-4 and Dr Ian MacDonald in the Opthalmology at the Royal Alexandra Hospital , a group of over 80 patients were studied to measure the recall and understanding of cataract surgery and their informed consent. 4

Our Results

Only 56.16% of our patients were able to correctly answer where a cataract formed (in the lens of the eye) and specifically/vaguely what a cataract was. The information was delivered in 6 different surgeon's offices (participants of the research project) with similar formats of brochures and education by clinical staff.

In comparison with other research, our patients were consistent in their retention of information delivered to them, as compared to other studies.

Communication

Communication is essential for the effective delivery of health care, and is one of the most powerful tools in a clinician's arsenal. 12 Unfortunately, there is often a mismatch between a clinician's level of communication and a patient's level of comprehension. In fact, evidence shows that patients often misinterpret or do not understand much of the information given to them by clinicians. This lack of understanding can lead to medication errors, missed appointments, adverse medical outcomes, and even malpractice lawsuits.2

Six steps to improving interpersonal communication with patients.

1. Slow down: Communication can be improved by speaking slowly, and by spending just a small amount of additional time with each patient. This will help foster a patient-centered approach to the clinician-patient interaction.
2. Use plain, nonmedical language: Explain things to patients like you would explain them to your grandmother.
3. Show or draw pictures: Visual images can improve the patient's recall of ideas.
4. Limit the amount of information provided— and repeat it. Information is best remembered when it is given in small pieces that are pertinent to the tasks at hand. Repetition further enhances recall.
5. Use the "teach-back" technique: Confirm that patients understand by asking them to repeat back your instructions.
6. Create a shame-free environment: Encourage questions. Make patients feel comfortable asking questions. Consider using the Ask-Me-3 program (What is my main problem? What do I need to do? Why is it important for me to do this?)

   Enlist the aid of others (patient's family or friends) to promote understanding.5,6

Conclusion.

When medical professionals use communication skills effectively, both they and their patients benefit. Firstly, doctors can identify their patients' problems more accurately. 13 Secondly, their patients are more satisfied with their care and can better understand their problems, investigations, and treatment options. Thirdly, patients' distress and their vulnerability to anxiety and depression are lessened. 14

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