

From the Editor's desk....



A patient's informed consent to investigations or treatment is a fundamental aspect of the proper provision of dental care. Without informed consent to treatment, a dentist is vulnerable to criticism on a number of counts, not least those of assault and/or negligence – which in turn could lead respectively to criminal charges and/ or civil claims against the dentist. Furthermore, the question of consent arises increasingly at the heart of complaints made under the Complaints Procedure, and complaints to the Dental Council on matters on professional ethics and conduct. It is self-evident, therefore, that every practicing dentist, therapist and hygienist needs not only a thorough understanding of the principles of consent, but also an awareness of how to apply these principles in the wide variety of circumstances that can arise in the practice of dentistry. The law is continually changing and developing, as the courts interpret both the common law and legislation. The doctrine of precedent means that judgments from a higher court will bind a lower court. At the same time, clinical knowledge and ability have developed, and this makes the interpretation of what constitutes informed consent and who can give it, a constantly changing perspective. Clinicians have a responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to keep abreast of changing standards, to show not only that the optimum treatment is being given to their patients, but also that the patients themselves have had the best opportunity to be involved in decision making about the care of their bodies

Informed consent actually is a process, not a form. However, most dental offices today opt for informed- consent forms. The forms should describe all pertinent facts of a given procedure and provide a section for the patient's signature as written documentation. A form ensures that all facts have been discussed, and a signature on the form implies that the patient understands these facts. Informed consent is very important, but it does not protect against all forms of misinformed consent consists of a patient's understanding of several issues surrounding treatment.

In order for consent to be valid, it must be given freely and voluntarily, without any pressure or influence being brought to bear on the patient. This pressure might be from a family member, parent or a health care professional. It is important when seeking to obtain consent that you satisfy yourself that consent has been freely given.

1. First and foremost, respect any patient's fundamental right to decide whether or not they wish to proceed with any dental treatment.
2. Assess the patient's competence to consent, bearing in mind their age and their ability to understand a. the nature of the proposed treatment b. its purpose c. any risks and limitations d. comparisons with any alternative treatment options which are available (including that of doing no treatment at all)
3. Satisfy yourself regarding the authority of the patient (or that of anyone else acting on the patient's behalf) to give consent to the proposed treatment.
4. Provide the patient with as much information as is appropriate and relevant (and as is required by the patient) regarding the points raised at 2 (a) (b) (c) (d) above. Invite questions from the patient, and answer any such questions fully, truthfully and fairly, trying to avoid making any dismissive comments about any possible risks.
5. Satisfy yourself that consent has been given voluntarily.
6. Bear in mind the situations where it might be sensible to give written information/ warnings as part of the process of obtaining a valid consent from the patient.
7. Keep good and careful records of all matters concerning the question of consent.

Prof. Saravana kumar. R
Editor - in - Chief
Journal of Scientific Dentistry