



Better education for patient consent

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A recent systematic review has found that modern interactive media helps surgical patients better understand the 'consent forms' they sign prior to surgery but there is still a wide divide between how doctors and patients view the purpose of obtaining consent.

The review featured in the April issue of the *ANZ Journal of Surgery* described how some patients felt the consent forms were simply a way to remove blame from the doctor or hospital in the event of complications.

The review synthesised the results of 13 high-quality studies conducted from January 1995 to March 2013 that met the review inclusion criteria.

When asked to reflect on the consenting process, between 21 per cent and 86 per cent of patients were able to recall the potential risks and complications of their medical procedure. The degree of understanding about the nature of the consent process decreased with age.

A comment from a patient in a New Zealand study was indicative: "I thought that by signing the form this meant that I was responsible for anything that happened in the process, even if it went wrong".

However, the review found that the use of interactive multimedia and written information produced the best recollection and understanding of consent from patients.

Some of the recommendations to emerge from the review included involving family members or support people in the consent process to enhance the patient's comprehension.

The review has strengthened the case for better patient information materials to improve understanding of the implications of surgery.

Executive Director of Surgical Affairs (Aust.) for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Dr John Quinn said, "Consent forms are designed to ensure that the patient is fully aware of, and agrees to what is to be done during the procedure as well as the impacts and implications including the varying risks involved depending in the surgery being performed."

"They are not designed to absolve the doctor or hospital from responsibility," he said.

The authors of the Journal article Anne Sherlock and Dr Sonya Brownie said, "There needs to be longer consultative discussions with specialists that encompass the procedure, risks and alternatives, that includes questions from the patient and their support person."

The *ANZ Journal of Surgery*, published by Wiley-Blackwell, is the pre-eminent surgical journal published in Australia, New Zealand and the South-East Asian region. The Journal is dedicated to the promotion of outstanding surgical practice, and research of contemporary and international interest.



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