

Informed Consent and Pakistan's Healthcare System

Amna Baig

Department of Philosophy and Liberal Arts, Government College University, Lahore.

Informed consent is a process which is created to involve a patient in his own treatment. It highlights the factor of freedom of choice and consent with the backdrop of autonomy.¹ It is in fact a framework which is comprised of a patient and a physician/researcher. Their relation relies on the rights and duties incurred by such association. The main intention of informed consent is the promotion of human rights.² Informed consent entails the capacity for decision-making, of being informed, and that the decision of the patient must be voluntary. Even though the doctrine of informed consent endorses ideals worth pursuing, a victorious execution of these ideals in practice is still too far to take place.³ Patients' susceptibility has amplified just as the complexity and power of medical science and technology have increased.

The primary challenge concerning informed consent in Pakistan lies in its implementation. Currently, there are no established regulations in our country, and the practice of obtaining informed consent is limited to certain ethical considerations within the medical community, often limited to specific institutions.⁴ In Pakistan, this concept remains unfamiliar to many, as patients traditionally accept treatments as prescribed by physicians without questioning. The idea of voluntary decision-making is largely absent in our society, with patients commonly deferring to the expertise of doctors.⁵ Addressing this issue requires empowering the public. It is crucial to shift the decision-making power to patients and their families. Raising awareness about the concept of informed consent⁶ through various educational campaigns is essential to instill this understanding within the community.

Corresponding Author:

Amna Baig

Government College University
Lahore.

Email: amna.baig708@gmail.com

Received: 23 October 2023, Accepted: 24 October 2023,

Published: 23 November 2023

Copyright © 2023 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article under the CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Informed consent, in its current practice, falls short to guarantee respect for autonomy. Under most situations, patients are assumed to be competent to make a decision. Practitioners should be duly careful in assessing patients for competence.⁷

In perspective of Pakistan, the idea of informed consent suffer at the hands of lack of health awareness, illiteracy, lack of resources, and dominance of doctors over patients choice and last but not the least paternalism.^{4,8} In order to make informed consent common in Pakistan we need to assure that patients' autonomy and free choice are a component of each and every physician-patient interaction, we need to actively promote them as principles that are completely indispensable in physicians' clinics, offices, and hospitals.⁹ In conclusion, informed consent can be enhanced by providing the people of Pakistan with health awareness, by ending language barrier, and whatever the patient decide regarding his treatment must be accepted by the physician¹⁰ and he must not force them to take the treatment suggested by him.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

References

1. Shah P, Thornton I, Turrin D, Hipskind JE. Informed Consent. StatPearls Publishing; 2023. (Accessed on 15th September 2023) Available from URL: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK430827/>.
2. Pugh J. Autonomy, Rationality, and Contemporary Bioethics [Internet]. Chapter 6, Informed Consent, Autonomy, and Beliefs. Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press; 2020. (Accessed on 15th September 2023) Available from URL: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556857/>
3. Bazzano LA, Durant J, Brantley PR. A modern history of informed consent and the role of key information. *Ochsner J* 2021; 21(1): 81-5.
4. Fazal A. Ethical issues in conducting cross-cultural research in low-income countries: a Pakistani perspective. *Asian Bioeth Rev* 2022; 14(2): 151-68.

5. Moazam F. Families, patients, and physicians in medical decisionmaking: a Pakistani perspective. *Hastings Center Rep* 2000; 30(6): 28-37.
 6. Adedeji O. Informed consent in clinical trials. Raise public awareness. *Br Med J* 1993; 307(6917): 1495.
 7. Khan RI. Informed consent and some of its problems in Pakistan. *J Pak Med Assoc* 2008; 58(2): 82.
 8. Clark B. Using Law to Fight a Silent Epidemic: The Role of Healthy Literacy in Health Care Access, Quality & Cost. *Annals Health L* 2011; 20: 253.
 9. Jafarey AM, Farooqui A. Informed consent in the Pakistani milieu: the physician's perspective. *J Med Ethics* 2005; 31(2): 93-6.
 10. Jawaid SA, Jawaid M. Patient's Rights and the practice of obtaining informed consent: The need for some corrective measures. *Pak J Med Sci* 2006; 22(1): 7.
-