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A Publication of the Center for Mental Health Services Research
A Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Research Center of Excellence

Informed Consent and the Clinician-Client Relationship

Informed consent creates a continuing dialogue and promotes a clinician-client relationship that fosters mutual respect, shared decision-making and client autonomy. Informed consent done correctly involves clinicians providing clients with the information necessary to make informed decisions about their treatment.

Two Models of Implementing Informed Consent

The Traditional Approach to Informed Consent: The Event Model

The event model of implementing informed consent treats it as a discrete act to be performed once in each treatment course. While satisfying the legal requirements of providing complete and accurate information, this model can lead to unintended consequences including:

- Not improving a client's comprehension of the treatment process
- Creating a more bureaucratic and less humane clinician and client interaction
- A client sensing that participation in the decision-making process is not desired

An Alternative Approach to Informed Consent: The Process Model

The process model engages the clinician and client in a continuing dialogue to:

- Promote ongoing communication throughout the course of treatment regarding client and clinician expectations for treatment; thus, informed consent is a process, not a single event
- Ensure that the client is able to integrate information into a well-organized understanding of their clinical situation
- Build on a vision of active client participation in treatment decision making

How to Incorporate the Process Model of Informed Consent:

1. Establish responsibility: Establish the clinician's responsibility and the expected duration of that responsibility (e.g. responsible for ongoing care, consultant, assisting others with care)
2. Define the problem: Clinician and client establish ongoing dialogue to work together to accurately define the problem/diagnosis
3. Discuss goals for treatment: Clinician should disclose the nature, purpose, risks, and benefits of proposed and alternative treatments to help clients make informed decisions about treatment goals
4. Select approach to treatment: Clinician and patient together decide on the course of treatment to achieve goals, taking into account both the clinician's professional opinion and the client's preferences
5. Extend treatment and follow-up: The informed consent process is incorporated into ongoing monitoring and treatment, reviewing and revising treatment plans as needed

Take Home Message:

Traditionally, the Event Model enabled clinicians to obtain informed consent for the primary purpose of addressing legal protection and ethical concerns. However, the Process Model of implementing informed consent establishes clinician and client as partners in an ongoing dialogue about treatment needs and choices.

Reference: Lidz, C.W., Appelbaum, P.S. & Meisel. A. (1988).Two models of implementing informed consent. Archives of Internal medicine 148.6. http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=610043. **Additional Resources:** http://works.bepress.com/charles_lidz/

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