

Informed Choice/Consent: Ethical care in the 21st Century



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Shifting societal values

- Changing relationship between clients and healthcare professionals
- People are generally better informed
- Low mortality rates leads to a focus on the importance of a positive birth experience

Four factors appear to influence satisfaction:

- Personal expectations, (Green, Coupland et al. 1990).
- The amount of support from caregivers,
- The quality of support from caregivers,
- Involvement in decision making (Hodnett 2002).

What women want

- Information (DOH, 2002)
 - ✓ Full
 - ✓ Accurate
 - ✓ Evidence-based
 - ✓ Individualised
- Choice (Kirkham 2004)
- Control (Simkin, 1991. Hadari 2002)

Informed choice

Concept of Informed choice based on following values:

1. Women have the right to information about their care and need to be involved in decisions about their own bodies
2. Women are the primary decision makers about what happens to them during pregnancy and birth

Informed consent

Refers to the permission sought for a particular procedure or treatment usually on a single occasion. The focus being on the pros and cons of that procedure.

Informed Choice/Consent applied to Epidurals

The concept of informed choice in relation to epidurals would be:

- a discussion on the implications of an a epidural, the pros and cons, and alternative strategies for coping with labour
- obtaining consent for the procedure including a discussion on the pros and cons of an epidural.

Informed Refusal

The flipside of informed consent is informed refusal. Sometimes people make decisions that we disagree with or don't fit into our idea of what is appropriate. When people are deemed legally capable of decision making it is our duty to respect these decisions.

Legal Status

- 1 The health care professional is obliged to to inform the patient comprehensively, completely and appropriately.
- 2 The discussion should include:
 - b*the purpose, the risks, the advantages and disadvantages, and the cost of the intended, diagnostic or therapeutic procedure and.
 - c* the alternatives available.

Art 39 GesG 2001 (Kanton BE)

International Code of Ethics for Midwives

„Midwives respect a woman's informed right of choice and promote the woman's acceptance of responsibility for the outcomes of her choices.

'informed' implies that complete information is given to and understood by the woman regarding the risks, benefits and probable outcomes of each choice available to her.“

International Confederation of Midwives, 1993

Implementing informed choice/consent in practice

(Discussion points)

- Find out what is important to the woman and her family
- Seek and assess evidence to inform decisions
- Tailor your discussion to the clients level of understanding

(Page; 2000)

Timing

- Pregnancy is a time for choices and decision making.
- Unhurried, relaxed atmosphere most conducive to imparting information.

Talking about risk

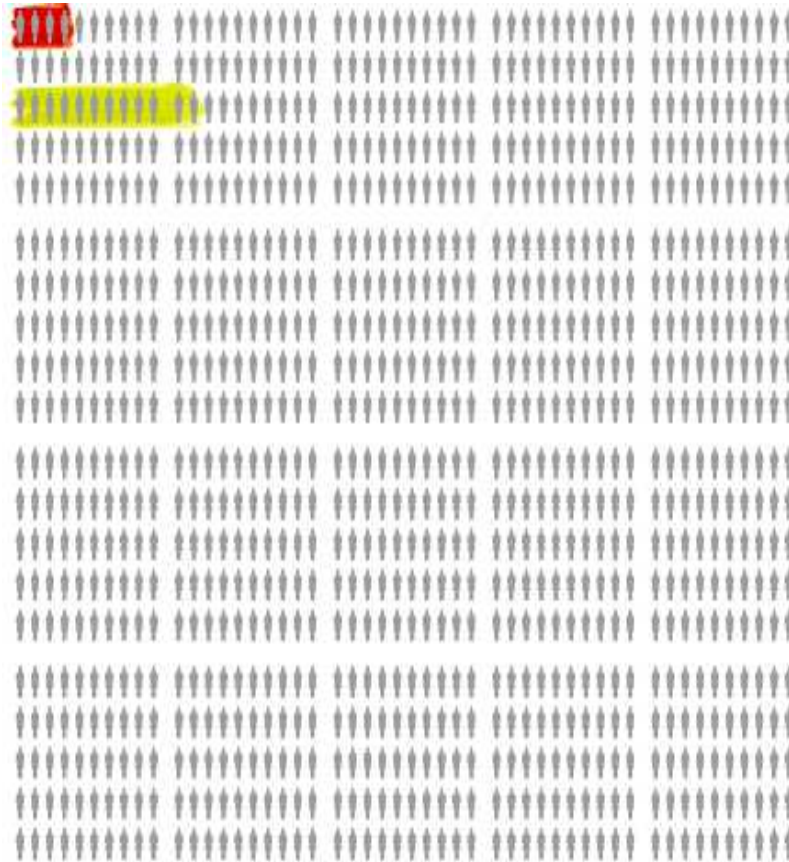
- Without an understanding of the risks people cannot give informed consent.
- Risks should be conveyed in a neutral and realistic manner.

(Paling 2003)

Techniques to help convey risk

- Avoid using descriptive tones such as low or high risk. (Merz 1991).
- Use a common denominator (Merz 1991).
- Present risks in both their negative and positive forms.
- Use visual aids (Paling 2003).

One Thousand People Pictures to help you



1. Risk of miscarriage from amniocentesis **4 out of 1000**
2. Odds for a 39 year old woman having a child with down syndrome **12 out of 1000**

(Paling 2008)

Examples of practice that facilitate informed choice/consent

- Continuity of care (Reed 2002)
- Woman held notes (Brown 2004)
- Birth plans (Green, Coupland et al., 1990)
- Written material

Epidural pain relief in labour

Pregnancy is a time of choices and decisions. In order to help you decide what is right for you, you need information about any potential advantages or disadvantages that there might be in the options available.

This leaflet is based on research to help you make your own choice



The use of epidural analgesia for women in labour



This leaflet is based on the best available research evidence

The degree to which individuals can tolerate pain varies considerably and is affected by a number of diverse physiological and psychological factors^{1,2}. This leaflet is about the use of epidural analgesia, a method of blocking the painful stimuli from the contracting uterus, enabling a labouring woman to be pain-free.

midirs

In collaboration with NHS Centre
for Reviews and Dissemination

Non-epidural pain relief

Coping with labour –
pain relief, comfort measures
and being in control.

This leaflet is based on research to help you make your own choice



Documentation

- Clear documentation of all discussions and written material given.
- This is of particular importance in cases where legal action is being taken

Conclusion

- It is both unethical and illegal to perform any procedure on a person without their informed consent.
- Healthcare professionals are ethically and legally obliged to incorporate the concepts of informed consent and choice into their everyday practice.

The way forward?



The way forward....

..... must be a shift away from outdated patient/healthcare professional relationships where people are passive recipients of care, to a relationship based on a sense of partnership and power sharing.

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- Informed choice leaflets available
from:<http://www.infochoice.org/ic/ic.nsf/TheLeaflets?openform>