

Informed Consent

Ensuring informed consent is properly obtained is a legal, ethical and professional requirement on the part of all treating health professionals and supports person-centred care.

Patients have the right to make an informed choice about their care and, in most cases, must give permission to proceed with treatment, examination or a procedure. That permission is called informed consent.

As the chiropractor, it is your responsibility to ensure valid informed consent is obtained, and to communicate and work with your patient to help them make the best decision for themselves. (Valid informed consent requires that the patient has the capacity to provide consent.)

It is an interactive process between the chiropractor, the patient and sometimes those close to the patient, such as their family.

Key principles of informed consent:

- Consent is an interactive process, not a one-off event.
- Communicate effectively. Provide information that is relevant to the patient, in a way they understand. Allow the patient to ask questions and discuss concerns. Give adequate time for the patient to make a decision.
- Explain their condition, the options available, the results of tests and procedures.
- Highlight risks specific to the patient, providing more sources of information if required.
- Explain what they can expect after the treatment or procedure.
- Cover all options available, including having no treatment, and those that you may not be able to provide.
- The patient has the right to refuse treatment and withdraw consent.
- Document discussions during the consent process, keeping clear and accurate records.
- For children or minors, consent may be given by a parent, guardian or other person acting in the place of a parent. Depending on the child's age, involve them as much as possible and explain in a way that they can understand.

Obtaining consent is a process of shared decision-making where you help the patient understand their health condition and the options for treating (or not treating) that condition. It is more than signing forms and completing paperwork. Take the time to ask questions so that you understand what matters to your patient, and what their concerns, wishes, goals and values are.

Questions to consider before going ahead with treatment:

- What is your patient's understanding of their condition and the outcome they are hoping to achieve?
- Have you (or another colleague) explained the different treatment options including the risks and benefits of each option, and the option of not treating (adopting a see what happens with time approach)?
- Have you given your patient relevant information that would influence how they would decide?
- If your patient is unsure about your advice or recommendations, are they aware that they can seek a second opinion?

- If a proposed treatment is new, experimental or lacks scientific evidence, have you explained this to your patient?
- Has your patient had enough time to ask questions and think about how they would like to proceed?
- Does your patient have additional needs (disability, language barriers, low health literacy) and need more support to make a decision?

How long does consent remain valid?

The general rule is that consent will remain valid until it is withdrawn by the patient or until the patient's circumstances change in a material respect.

Informed financial consent

This is an important but separate consent process.

References

[NSW Health - Consent to medical and healthcare treatment manual](#)

[NSW Health - Your health care rights and responsibilities](#)

[Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care](#)

[Health Navigator \(New Zealand\)](#)

[Medical Council of New Zealand](#)