

# eConsent:

Enhancing the 'patient consent to treatment' process

## Introduction

eConsent is a unique, digital solution which individualises and enhances the patient consent to treatment process. Invented by Stephen Lake, a Consultant Surgeon, and pioneered by Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, eConsent has enabled the Trust to improve patient experience, save consultant time and standardise information delivery processes.

Following eight successful years at the Trust, a joint venture has been formed with e-Health Innovations to launch the solution into the wider NHS market.

## Background

The standard, long-standing process for discussing and obtaining procedure consent relies upon a manual process. Whilst it is ultimately the responsibility of the senior responsible clinician, it is often handled inappropriately by a more junior member of the team. Manual consent forms which rely on memory are often incomplete; littered with acronyms and abbreviations; and sometimes are even missing dates or signatures.

eConsent prepares the nationally agreed forms for obtaining procedure consent, with corresponding information leaflet(s), while satisfying the associated regulatory requirements. Patients undergoing planned procedures have more time to review documentation either personally or with their carers to understand the risks and benefits of the procedure before agreeing to proceed. Having a standardised approach enables auditing of clinical practices with the additional benefit of reduced risk of litigation.

eConsent helps support clinicians in adhering to General Medical Council Guidelines as highlighted in the recent Supreme Court judgement (Montgomery -v- Lanarkshire Health Board), which sets out that doctors must ensure patients are aware of all material risks and provide documentary evidence of the structured discussion between a competent healthcare professional for the specific procedure being considered by the individual patient concerned. It thus supports the "no decision about me without me" mantra.



## Improving the process with technology

Digitising the patient consent to treatment process by using eConsent enables nationally recognised procedure consent forms to be created dynamically, pre-populated with individual patient demographics and presented to the patient in the context of the proposed procedure, along with the associated information leaflet or leaflets during the individual patient discussion.

Clinical 'risks' and 'benefits' are automatically populated based on the individual patient and the planned procedure from a pre-determined and clinically approved 'library', to provide agreed, standardised and relevant clinical information. This enables consistency and accuracy, providing all relevant risks and benefits and thus ensuring the patient is fully and comprehensively consulted, with readily accessible evidence should it ever be required.

Using eConsent at the Trust in an access-controlled manner has enabled competent clinicians to give individual patients and their carers much more information about the procedure, including the specific risks and benefits involved for that individual.

From the Trust point of view, it saves a considerable amount of time, as it means individually adjusted pre-populated forms can be printed out, rather than the clinician having to handwrite them. The form is stored on the server and can be scanned back into the system once signed.

## Tangible benefits

Sharing information has reaped benefits not only for patients and carers but also for hospital staff and for the organisation as a whole.

### ***Benefits for patients and carers:***

- Improved consent process with clear information about the procedure; risks; benefits and alternatives. The consultation focuses on the patient rather than writing out the consent form.
- The system has in-built notification of individual competency to ensure that consent is obtained only by individuals trained and competent to explain the specified procedure and thus obtain informed consent.
- Patients (and if appropriate - their carers) receive information sooner in the process – with more time to consider options and obtain further information if required.
- Facility exists to support the process by e-mailing the documentation produced to the individual patient if requested during the consultation.

### ***Benefits for staff obtaining consent:***

- Reduction in time spent by healthcare professionals with cessation of hand-writing individual consent forms – saving clinician and clinic time.
- Development of 'gold standard' procedure-specific patient information leaflets which gives consistent information.
- Identification of agreed risks, benefits and alternatives for each procedure performed within the different departments of the Trust with production of a 'checklist' of risks and benefits to guide each consultation.
- Well-developed linkage with Patient Administration portal allowing rapid individualised access to the system during each patient consultation.

### **Benefits for the organisation:**

- Reduction in complaints and litigation – having a standardised approach enables auditing of clinical practices.
- Savings in consultant time – the need to have pre-printed consent forms is removed and the time taken for consultants and other healthcare deliverers to obtain robust and auditable consent is dramatically reduced.
- Cost savings in the production of both patient information leaflets and consent forms with lean approach to document production.
- Standardisation of information and process across the Trust's multiple sites and departments.
- Solution facilitates progress towards paperless status.
- Designed to comply with Risk Management standards.
- Archived consent forms with link to the information form used during the consultation (document management system for patient information leaflets).
- Production of complete, legible documentation to support the patient's admission with reduction of risk to the process.

## **100% improvement**

***Yearly Consent Audits for surgical and investigative procedures undertaken by the Worcestershire Acute Trust's Clinical Governance Department have demonstrated substantial improvements to the process.***

### **Prior to the introduction of eConsent:**

- Only 49% of medical notes had documented evidence that the benefits and risks of a procedure have been discussed with the patient.
- Only 69% of consent forms had the date that the consent was obtained recorded.
- Only 63% had the patient's NHS number recorded.

All of these indicators (and others) were corrected to 100% by the introduction of the digitised system. Furthermore, the 25% of hand-written forms found to contain illegible items such as the name of the procedure to be performed and the 21% of forms completed by a non-competent Healthcare Professional were both reduced to 0%.

All of the above audit data is representative of the current process throughout the wider NHS (Bulletin of Royal College of Surgeons: 97(3); March 2015).

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## A successful collaboration – releasing benefit across the NHS

Following eight successful years at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, the Trust has now formed a joint venture with e-Health Innovations, to commercialise the Trust's 'home grown' IT solution and launch this unique product into the wider healthcare market.

Combining the clinical expertise and advantage of a proven technology solution developed at the coal-face, with a UK based market leader of healthcare IT who has the infrastructure and experience to offer the solution to the wider NHS, means that the value of this innovation is no longer contained within a single NHS Trust but has been released to be replicated throughout the wider NHS.

## Future developments

Planned developments include the ability to access the programme via a tablet device to facilitate 'at the bedside' discussions for emergency patients, for whom comprehensive and structured discussions of procedures is even more challenging for the clinicians involved. Furthermore, the ability to obtain and store an electronic signature via a tablet device will be of additional assistance to the responsible clinical team.



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