Informed Consent forms

The informed consent forms that are commonly used in Naturopathic clinics contain what I have divided into three parts. These parts are: the Clinic Introduction; Clinic Policies; and a generalized Informed Consent. This form is usually provided to the patient to sign before any consultation is performed.

According to the lawyer for Partners Indemnity, informed consent is 'the process of dialogue involving ongoing, full and complete discussions between a health care practitioner and a patient' regarding a **particular** treatment or procedure and includes: the nature of the proposed treatment or procedure, any material risks, and any special or unusual risks associated with the procedure; alternative treatments that are available and their associated risks; and the risks of non-treatment. The patient also needs to be informed that they have the right to refuse treatment, or withdraw their consent to treatment, at any time. Informed consent is, therefore, dependent on the circumstances of each particular patient and cannot be given in a generalized form that is signed before any consultation is performed.

With this in mind I have put together the following recommendations for information that is generally provided in the informed consent form.

Clinic Introduction
The clinic introduction is optional and is used to explain Naturopathic medicine and what types of testing and treatment is done in the clinic. If the clinic introduction is used it should be separate from the Clinic Policies and Informed Consent portions (either on a separate page or a separate section on the same page). No signature of patient understanding is needed for this section. This information should **not** include any false or extraordinary claims such as a guarantee of results. This could open yourself and your clinic up to legal action from patients and/or disciplinary action from the CNPBC.
The clinic introduction could include:
- explanation of Naturopathic medicine (e.g. tenets)
- explanation of Naturopathic treatments
- types of testing done in office

Clinic policies
The clinic policies section will probably include portions that need a signed acknowledgment by the patient. Again, this section should be separate from the Clinic introduction section if it is used. This section should be followed by the statement, 'I have read, understand, and agree to the above clinic policies' followed by a line for the patients name (printed) and signature.
The clinic policies section should include:
- an explanation of confidentiality and how we are bound by the bylaws of the CNPBC (it may be too onerous to explain the whole bylaw pertaining to confidentiality in this document but a brief outline with a referral to the CNPBC website may suffice or a copy of this bylaw provided at patients request)
- an explanation of the clinic payment policy and cancellation policy (e.g. full payment on completion of visit, MSP opt out, 24 hour cancellation, etc.)

Informed Consent

As stated above, informed consent should be obtained after a consultation for each individual treatment or procedure that is being considered for the patient. Forms signed before a consultation that outline generalized adverse effects to treatments that may or may not be performed does not constitute informed consent. A form that is given to the patient before the first consultation may be used to outline what informed consent will look like. It is not necessary for you to have this portion signed.

The Informed Consent section should include:

- an explanation of informed consent (what it includes)
    - a diagnosis will be made and a treatment (or treatments) will be considered
    - for each treatment the risks, benefits, cost, and adverse effects will be discussed
    - any alternative treatments for the diagnosed condition and the risks, benefits, and adverse effects of those treatments
    - the risks of not treating the diagnosed condition
- an explanation of the patients right to refuse treatment or withdraw their consent to treatment at any time

Some NDs do not have an informed consent form to be signed prior to the first visit and some do not use informed consent forms for treatments that have been recommended. Some rely solely on their chart notes and documenting their discussion with, and consent given by, the patient. This may be adequate for some therapies (i.e. herbal remedies or supplements) but it may be more prudent to have a signed consent to treatment form for some of the more invasive therapies (i.e. prolotherapy or chelation therapy).

It is my sincere hope that none of us ever has to actually go back to the informed consent form due to a legal issue that has arisen from one of our therapies, but in reality it could happen to any one of us. It is for this reason that all Naturopathic Doctors should institute some form of documented informed consent protocol for their practice.

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