



Royal Cornwall Hospitals
NHS Trust

Your consent to treatment



One + all | we care

Before a doctor, nurse or other health professional examines or treats you they need your consent (agreement). This can simply mean telling them that you agree with the treatment or investigations they recommend, but sometimes a written record of your consent is required. This depends on the type of treatment you require and whether it carries any risks. (For example, you will always be asked to sign a consent form before having a general anaesthetic).

What if I'm unable to give consent?

If you are unable to give consent due to a disability, condition, unconsciousness or the effects of drugs or alcohol, your doctor and other healthcare professionals will make sure you get the treatment best for you. We will, where possible, consult your family and carers.

Senior medical staff may also make decisions for you if you have been detained under the Mental Health Act.

If you are under 16 years of age, your parents or guardian may need to give consent for you. Please tell us as soon as possible if you have made an advance decision (living will) that might affect your treatment. We will enter the details in your medical notes and respect your wishes.

What should I know before giving my consent?

We want to involve you in all of the decisions about your care and treatment. However, if you do not want to know about certain aspects of your treatment, please tell us.

Based on your condition and medical history a treatment or investigation will be recommended. To enable you to make an informed decision, we will explain about the:

- type of treatment recommended
- risks and benefits of the treatment
- alternatives
- side-effects
- consequences of not having treatment.

It's up to you to decide whether to go ahead with the proposed treatment, or to choose another. We all have different thoughts about how much risk or pain we find acceptable. Your wishes will be respected at all times. However, we cannot give you a treatment that:

- is not available, or
- we feel is not suitable for you.

If you decide to have the treatment you will be asked to sign the consent form and offered a copy to keep. It will contain details about your proposed treatment or investigation and any additional information, as necessary.

What if I don't understand?

Please ask questions, particularly if there is something about your treatment that you don't understand. You may find it helpful to write down any questions you would like to ask. You are welcome to bring a friend, family member or advocate with you for support and to ask questions on your behalf.

Who is treating me?

Amongst the health professionals treating you may be a 'doctor in training' - medically qualified, but now doing more specialist training. They range from recently qualified doctors to those almost ready to be consultants. They will only carry out procedures for which they have been appropriately trained. Someone senior will supervise - either in person or by being available as necessary.

Is there anything I should tell my doctor?

It is important we know about any concerns you have about your proposed treatment so that we can discuss them with you. It is also important that we know about your previous illnesses or allergies, and about any medication you are taking.

What about anaesthesia?

If your treatment involves general or regional anaesthesia (where more than a small part of your body is being anaesthetised), you'll be given general information about it in advance. You'll also have an opportunity to talk with the anaesthetist when he or she assesses your state of health shortly before treatment. You may be asked to attend a pre-assessment clinic a few weeks before your treatment. This is a good opportunity to ask questions and discuss any concerns you may have.

What if I need any tests?

As part of your treatment, we may need to take samples of your blood or a biopsy (small piece of tissue for testing).

Your doctor should tell you in advance if these might be taken. Some kinds of operation involve removing a part of the body (such as a gall bladder or tooth). Again, you will always be told about this in advance.

We may also take clinical images, including X-rays, scans, photographs and videos. Please be assured that these will be treated confidentially. This information will help us to make sure you receive the best possible care and treatment.

Will anyone else see the samples or images?

Sometimes, we use medical samples for teaching, research, or public health monitoring purposes. However, we will not use them in a way that could identify you, unless we have your permission. Images, including X-rays, scans, photographs and videos are also used for teaching and research. Again, these will not be published or used in a way that could identify you, unless we have your permission. If you have any concerns about this, please tell us.

What if I change my mind about the treatment?

If you change your mind about having the treatment, please tell us immediately. You can withdraw your consent at any time, even after signing a consent form.

Further information

The Department of Health leaflet, Consent - What you have the right to expect, is a detailed guide about consent.

Versions are available for adults, children, parents, carers/relatives and for people with learning disabilities. Your clinic or hospital may have some, or you can get one from the NHS Responseline on: 0800 038 5300 or from the NHS website at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/consent-to-treatment/

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

