

By VIRGIL GUITARD

YOU'VE ASKED

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I read that RNs should obtain consent for the nursing care they provide. Am I to obtain consent for all nursing care provided?

THE SHORT ANSWER TO THIS question is YES. Obtaining consent for nursing care protects clients' rights to manage their own health care through a process of meaningful decision-making. Furthermore, clients have a legal right to information about their care and treatment, and a right to consent to, or refuse nursing care.

If the client's consent is to be obtained for nursing care, should a consent form be signed?

Not necessarily. The consent form is merely a tool sometimes used to obtain consent, such as for nursing research and in situations normally determined by employer policy. A written consent is not required for "repetitive and routine aspects of nursing care". To obtain consent for repetitive and routine aspects of nursing care, the client should be given the opportunity to participate in the development of the nursing plan of care and consent to it. RNs must, however, remember that even if consent was obtained, they are still

responsible to provide information to the client when providing care.

If a consent form is not required, how will the nursing team know that consent has been obtained for the overall plan of care?

By documenting. Documentation is an important step of the consent process. Documentation does not mean having the client sign a consent form (which is a tool), but means having the RN make and keep records of her practice, thus meeting professional standards. Documenting the participation of the client in the development of the plan of care will demonstrate that the patient was informed regarding the plan and has consented to it.

What about obtaining consent for care or treatment provided by other health care providers?

When involved in care or treatment that is provided by another health care provider (e.g., surgeon, anaesthetist), RNs must ensure the client has given

consent, has sufficient information and understands the proposed care or treatment. If necessary, she must advocate for and support the client in getting more information.

Registered nurses, however, may have to witness the signing of a consent form. According to the Canadian Nurses Protective Society, a nurse or other designated person may witness the signing of the consent form even when the physician has explained the procedure elsewhere. Witnessing a signature is not a declaration that the RN provided information about risks and alternatives (CNPS, 1994). Institutional policies should be followed regarding witnessing consent and the duration of a previously signed consent form.

For more information:

- Practice Guideline: Consent (2011)
- Or contact NANB's Practice Department at 1-800-442-4417 or by e-mail at www.nanb.nb.ca. ■



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