

Quick Tips for the Dental Office



Informed Consent



Informed consent provides patients with information to decide whether to begin a new procedure, or to remain in their current condition. Informed consent discussions with patients must include a description of the procedure, and the risks and alternatives involved that a reasonable person would consider significant in deciding whether or not to have the procedure. It must be clear that the patient has an understanding of the reasonably achievable and expected results.

Informed consent conversations must be direct, face-to-face conversations between the patient and the dentist. Patients must be able to ask questions of the dentist regarding the procedure, and thus the use of support staff does not constitute compliance with information consent. The effective use of informed consent can also assist the dentist in avoiding potential disputes with patients. Patients that are fully aware of the risks and limitations of a procedure are less likely to be dissatisfied with the work performed.

Best practices include giving the patient a procedure specific, written, consent form with the estimated date of the procedure. This serves as confirmation that the informed consent conversation occurred between the dentist and the patient. The dentist and the patient should both sign the form. In addition, the dentist should also document the informed consent and the execution of the form directly in the patient's chart.

When Do I Need Informed Consent?

Any procedure that is surgical or operative, including the administration of anesthesia, requires informed consent.

Examples include: root canals, extractions and implants.

Informed consent must be obtained at some point prior to the procedure; however, dentists must use judgement as to whether informed consent should be re-obtained. For example, if a patient provided informed consent, but then comes back a year later for the procedure to be performed, informed consent should be re-obtained.

If a patient is having the same procedure done multiple times, it is preferable to obtain informed consent prior to each treatment. It is possible the known complications or alternatives to the procedure have changed since the last treatment, or the patient's individual circumstances may have changed.

Informed Consent, cont'd.

When it comes to treating minors (less than 18 years of age), you must gain informed consent from a parent or guardian prior to performing the procedure, barring the existence of an emergency situation.

Sample informed consent forms can be found on PDA's website at: https://www.padental.org/Online/Resources_Programs/Practice_Management_Resources/Informed_Consent.aspx.

For more information regarding the requirements of informed consent, please refer to this article published in the Jan/Feb 2018 issue of the PD Journal: <https://view.joomag.com/pennsylvania-dental-journal-jan-feb-2018/0660007001516391445/p18?short&>.