

Patient information

Consent – it's your choice

At Care UK, prior to undertaking any diagnostic examination, the Radiographer, Sonographer or Consultant Radiologist will ask you to consent to the examination.

The consent process may sometimes involve you asking the healthcare professional some questions which will help you to understand what happens during the examination, if there are any risks associated with it and what the outcomes of the examination for you will be.

In general terms, the doctor or clinician who has referred you for a diagnostic examination has done so to obtain a clinical diagnosis. It must however be emphasised that before undertaking any diagnostic examination at Care UK, you do have a choice as to whether you go ahead with it or not.

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about what you have a right to expect and what you can do when it comes to consent.

What does consent really mean?

In a Care UK diagnostic imaging centre, before a clinician undertakes your examination, they must seek your consent or permission to do so. Your consent could simply be 'implied' by the radiographer; when asking you whether you have attended for an X-ray of your ankle, you confirm yes and continue by removing your shoe and sock ready for the examination.

Care UK also implements a written consent procedure which asks that patients sign a consent form to acknowledge their consent for the examination they have been referred for.

More important than how you show your consent is that your consent is actually genuine or valid.

For this to be the case:

- You must be able to give your consent
- You must be given enough relevant information
- You must be acting under your own free will

Under English law, it is assumed that if you are an adult (at least 16 years or older), you are able to make your own decisions unless it can be proved otherwise. Provided that you are able to understand and interpret the information given to you, you should be able to make a decision to consent for your diagnostic examination.

What if I am unable to make a decision?

Normally, no one can give consent for an examination on behalf of another adult, including husbands, wives, partners or close relatives.

These people may however be able to advise healthcare professionals about a patient's beliefs and values, or whether they have accepted or refused certain kinds of examinations/treatments in the past. It is important therefore as a patient to discuss your views with your friends and relatives, particularly in advance of any examination or treatment you may be having.

What if I am asked for my permission for students to be present during my examination?

You may be asked if you consent to allowing students to be present during your examination. The purpose of this is to assist the students, who are on placement with Care UK, with the development of their practical training skills.

They may be either observing or actually undertaking your examination under the direct supervision of a fully competent clinician.

If you are not happy for students to be present or to undertake your examination, you can say no and they will not participate in your examination.

To help make a decision, what sort of information do I need?

In order to make an informed decision, you must have access to information about the examination that you have been referred for. Care UK provides a range of patient information guides across all diagnostic imaging examinations. These have been produced to enable patients to understand more details about their examination and offer guidance on any preparation that maybe required prior to attending your appointment. The guides will also advise you on any risks associated with the examination and will indicate how long your results will take to return to your referring clinician.

You should always feel happy to ask any questions about your examination if you don't understand something or if you simply want more information. The clinician who undertakes your examination will be happy to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have in order for you to consent to the examination.

Examples of some questions you might want to ask of a healthcare professional could be:

- What will the examination involve?
- What are the benefits from the examination for me?
- Are there any risks from the examination?
- Are there any alternative examinations?
- What would happen to me if I refused to undertake an examination?

If the person asking for your consent to the examination isn't able to answer your questions, ask them to find out or arrange for someone else to talk to you about any concerns you may have.

How much do I need to know?

The decision on how much a person wants to know about their diagnostic examination is very much a personal thing. Some people want to find out everything they can to help inform any decision they will make, whereas others want to know very little and leave the decisions to the healthcare professionals. No one should force information upon you, such as the risks that might be involved in an examination, if you don't want to know. You are best placed to decide what is important to you and how much information you require to consent to your diagnostic examination.

How much time can I take to decide?

If you have questions about your examination, you can discuss these with a clinician prior to your appointment by contacting the centre directly or simply ask them when you arrive at the centre. You must be happy to consent to your examination before the procedure is carried out.

Can I refuse to undertake an examination?

Yes, you have the right to refuse any examination. In this case, Care UK will record that you were not happy to consent for the examination and return your referral to the doctor or other healthcare professional that referred you to this centre. They will then be able to discuss any concerns with you and offer advice about alternative examinations or treatments that maybe suitable for you.

Does Care UK have a Policy on Consent?

Yes, Care UK has a dedicated policy entitled, 'Consent to Physical Examination or Treatment.' This document is well researched and includes information from the relevant Acts of Parliament. The policy provides further detail on the topic of consent including the key terminology used and also defines our responsibilities as healthcare professionals when obtaining consent from patients within the services provided at Care UK.

Where can I go for more help with consent?

Organisation

Department of Health

How they could help?

The Department of Health publication entitled 'Reference guide to consent for examination and treatment, 2nd Edition, 2009 offers guidance on general legal and ethical principles of consent.

Patient Association

PO Box 953, Harrow
Middlesex HA1 3YJ
Tel: 020 8423 9111
Fax: 020 8423 9119
Helpline: 0845 608 4455
www.patients-association.org.uk

The helpline can help by providing information on a wide range of issues, ranging from finding local support groups for certain medical conditions, NHS services and support groups to providing information on what patients are entitled to, making a complaint and listening to patients' experiences.

Patient Concern

PO Box 23732
London SW5 9FY
www.patientconcern.org.uk

Patient Concern is an organisation committed to promoting choice and empowerment for all health service users.

UKAN: UK Advocacy Network

Volsolve House, 14 -18 West Bar
Sheffield S1 2DA
www.u-kan.co.uk

The UK Advocacy Network (UKAN) was founded in 1990 to be a national resource, linking mental health user groups of all types. The common aim is the use of advocacy in many forms to empower people who use specialist services.

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