

CONSENTING ADOLESCENT PATIENTS FOR SURGERY – ARE PAEDIATRIC SURGEONS COMPETENT?

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Aim of the Study: Under Scottish Law, young adults deemed to have capacity can consent or refuse treatment. If under 16, and thought to lack capacity, consent is obtained from persons with parental responsibility. Over 16's who lack capacity are subject to Adults with Incapacity Legislation. We aimed to identify whether our consent practices are in keeping with the law, and assess the effect of a local promotional campaign.

Methods: An initial retrospective casenote review of general paediatric surgery patients was performed over a 6-month period from July 2013. Patient demographics, person giving consent, and patient capacity was recorded. Following this, an online scenario-style questionnaire was conducted, the results were distributed, and factsheets were displayed throughout the hospital. The audit was repeated over a 3 month period from October 2016. Differences were analysed using Fischers Exact test.

Results: There were 106 patients in the first 6-month audit (89 between 13-15 years, and 17 >16 years). 28/89 adolescents (31%) signed their own form (table 1) and a further 45% were assessed to have had capacity despite parents signing. No adult with incapacity forms were filled out despite 3 patients meeting criteria.

In the second audit there were 86 patients in 3 months (61 between 13-15 years, and 25 >16 years). An increased number of 13-15 year old patients signed their own forms ($p=0.004$), although there was also an apparent reduction in patients assessed to lack capacity (24% before intervention and 5% after, $p=0.003$). In the follow-up study, 2 adult with incapacity forms were completed, despite 2 other patients meeting criteria.

Conclusion: Although the increase in 13-15 year olds who signed their own consent form was statistically significant, despite education, many adolescents are still not being consented in accordance with the law. Further promotional work is planned on a national level.

	13-15 year olds			16+ year olds		
	Initial	After intervention	<i>P</i>	Initial	After intervention	<i>P</i>
Signed own form	28/89 (31%)	34/61 (56%)	0.004	14/17 (82%)	20/25 (80%)	1.0
Should have signed but parent signed instead	40/89 (45%)	24/61 (39%)	0.5	3/17 (18%)	1/25 (4%)	0.29
Lacked capacity to sign	21/89 (24%)	3/61 (5%)	0.003	3/17 (18%)	4/25 (16%)	1.0

Table 1 Person who signed consent form for surgery before and after promotional campaign. Differences were analysed using Fisher's exact test.