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Improving surgical consent – a quality improvement project to enhance the consenting process

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Introduction: RCS guidelines on consent, recently updated, encourage a dialogue where all risks material to that patient are discussed and are clear. An audit was performed to assess whether practice at Oxford Hospitals is compliant with these guidelines – that all patients for elective surgery are consented prior to admission.

Method: Thirty-two undergoing elective Functional Endoscopic Sinus Surgery (FESS), Tonsillectomy and Septoplasty were interviewed in May-June 2019. Baseline data were presented at a local educational meeting, along with education on the recent changes to the RCS guidelines. Repeat audit took place in August-September 2020.

Results: All 32 patients were consented as per RCS guidelines and understood the reason for their surgery, but only 31% could explain the risks, and 56% could explain alternative options. Twenty (63%) consent forms were easily legible on randomised heuristic assessment. After education and change in department practice, understanding of the operation was much improved (80-100%). One outcome was to create pre-filled consent forms for common ENT operations.

Conclusions: Whilst RCS policy on completing consent prior to admission is being achieved, patient interviews suggest a lack of understanding of the operation. Standardised consent forms have the potential to enhance this understanding, as well as saving time.