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Knowledge and Attitudes towards Informed Consent Amongst Fourth and Final Year Medical Students

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Informed consent is an essential component of medical ethics as it upholds the fundamental right of patients to choose their own treatment. In a developing country such as Pakistan, patients are unaware of their rights and doctors enjoy a paternalistic role. The aim of this study was to obtain an insight into the concept of informed consent amongst medical students. This will serve an important purpose as these medical students are the future clinicians.

The study was conducted at two public and one private medical Colleges of Karachi and a sample of 209 medical students in the fourth and final year was taken. After completing all ethical requirements, a self administered questionnaire was used for data collection to assess the knowledge and attitude of students regarding Informed Consent. The sample included 62% students from public while 38% were from private medical Colleges. Ninety seven percent of respondents thought that ethics played an important role in clinical practice and 96% of them agreed that Informed consent is essential for all.

Seventy percent of the respondents gave affirmation that informed consent was a process that lets the patient know his treatment options while 18% were of the view that it was only a legal formality. Regarding the components of informed consent, it was notable that 21% of the students thought that the doctor should not discuss other treatment options which are unavailable at the hospital.

In emergency procedures like intubation, 43% of the respondents were of the view that informed consent was not required. In case of elective procedures, 49% of respondents agreed that an informed consent can be given by any relative. In the case of an unconscious patient, 64% of the students were of the view that any immediate relative could sign on behalf of the patient. Medical students are aware of the importance of informed consent and they regard it as a legal and ethical process which imparts autonomy to the patient. However, knowledge needs to be imparted regarding consent during emergency