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## Ensuring informed consent in low-income settings: Opinion piece

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### Abstract

In low-income healthcare settings, the implementation of informed consent faces significant challenges despite its pivotal role in upholding patient autonomy and dignity. A study conducted in southeastern Nigeria at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital sheds light on these challenges, particularly concerning patient satisfaction and recall of critical information post-consent. While many patients recalled details about their medical condition and planned procedures, there was notably lower recall of associated risks, emphasizing the complexity of conveying risk-related information effectively. Importantly, the study reveals a correlation between patient satisfaction with the consent process and their subsequent recall of information, underlining the intrinsic link between patient engagement, satisfaction, and comprehension. To bridge this gap, tailored communication methods and addressing patient concerns are essential. Systemic deficiencies in the consent process, including generic forms and linguistic barriers, call for interventions such as culturally sensitive consent materials and capacity building for healthcare providers. Looking forward, innovative approaches, including pictorial aids and mobile health applications, should be explored, alongside longitudinal studies to assess their impact. Ultimately, prioritizing patient satisfaction and comprehension in the consent process is crucial for upholding ethical standards in healthcare delivery, even amidst resource constraints.

**Keywords:** Low-income Settings; Southeastern Nigeria; Consent Forms; Ethical Standards; Healthcare.

### 1. Introduction

In modern medicine, the notion of informed consent stands as a cornerstone of ethical medical practice, epitomizing the autonomy and dignity of patients in their healthcare decisions. However, the practical implementation of informed consent, particularly in low-income settings, presents a myriad of challenges. A recent study conducted in southeastern Nigeria sheds light on the intricate relationship between the satisfaction of patients with the consent process and their subsequent recall of critical information. The findings underscore the imperative for healthcare providers to prioritize the satisfaction of patients in the informed consent process, especially in resource-constrained environments. The study, conducted at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, delved into the extent of patient recall regarding the nature of their medical condition, the planned surgical procedure, and associated risks following the consent process. Surprisingly, while a significant proportion of patients could recall the nature of their condition and the planned procedure, the recall of associated risks was notably lower. This discrepancy underscores the complexity of conveying risk-related information effectively, a challenge exacerbated by linguistic, cultural, and educational barriers prevalent in low-income settings [1].

One of the pivotal revelations of the study is the correlation between patients' satisfaction with the consent process and their subsequent recall of information. Patients who reported that their concerns were satisfactorily addressed demonstrated better recall of consent information compared to those who felt their concerns were not adequately

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attended to. This linkage emphasizes the intrinsic connection between patient engagement, satisfaction, and comprehension, thereby underscoring the importance of fostering a patient-centered approach to healthcare delivery. In resource-constrained settings like Nigeria, where literacy rates are often low, and healthcare infrastructure may be rudimentary, the onus falls heavily on healthcare providers to bridge the gap in understanding between clinicians and patients [2]. Strategies for achieving this include tailored communication methods, such as oral discussions in local languages, simplified written materials, and multimedia aids. However, these strategies must go beyond mere information dissemination to actively address patients' concerns and preferences, thereby fostering a collaborative decision-making process.

Moreover, the study highlights systemic deficiencies in the informed consent process within low-income settings. Generic consent forms lacking essential information, coupled with linguistic and cultural barriers, pose significant obstacles to achieving truly informed consent. Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted interventions, including the development of culturally sensitive consent materials, capacity building for healthcare providers in effective communication skills, and advocacy for policy reforms to standardize and enhance the consent process [3]. Looking ahead, there is a pressing need for further research to explore innovative approaches to improving informed consent in low-income settings. Future studies could investigate the efficacy of novel communication tools, such as pictorial aids or mobile health applications, in enhancing patient comprehension and engagement. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking patient outcomes following interventions aimed at improving informed consent would provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of these initiatives on patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment, and clinical outcomes.

The findings underscore the importance of prioritizing patient satisfaction in the informed consent process, especially in resource-constrained settings. Addressing patients' concerns during the consent process is crucial for enhancing patient comprehension and recall of critical information [4]. Systemic deficiencies in the consent process, including generic consent forms and linguistic barriers, necessitate urgent interventions to standardize and enhance the consent process [5]. Explore innovative communication tools, such as pictorial aids or mobile health applications, in improving patient comprehension and engagement in low-income settings [6]. Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of interventions aimed at enhancing informed consent on patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment, and clinical outcomes. Investigate the role of cultural competence training for healthcare providers in effectively communicating with patients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Evaluate the efficacy of policy reforms aimed at standardizing and enhancing the informed consent process in low-income settings [7].

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## 2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of informed consent within low-income settings underscores the pressing need to address the obstacles and mandates inherent in delivering patient-centred care. By placing paramount importance on patient satisfaction and comprehension during the consent procedure, healthcare providers can equip patients with the knowledge necessary to make well-informed choices regarding their health. In doing so, they uphold the bedrock principles of autonomy and dignity within the healthcare framework. As we confront the intricacies of contemporary healthcare, let us resolutely reiterate our dedication to centring patients in the decision-making sphere, regardless of socioeconomic limitations. It is imperative that we recognize and actively work to mitigate the disparities that exist in access to information and healthcare resources. Through collaborative efforts and a steadfast commitment to inclusivity, we can strive towards a healthcare landscape where every individual is empowered to participate fully in their own care journey.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

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### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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