Briefing Document: Key Themes and Ideas from Simon Parsons on Informed Consent

Source: Excerpts from "10 Mr Simon Parsons_SRT_English.srt.pdf"

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Author/Speaker: Simon Parsons. Consultant Upper-GI Surgeon, Honorary Professor at University of Nottingham and Co-founder of EIDO.

Overview:

This document summarises the key themes and important ideas presented by Simon Parsons regarding the process of obtaining informed consent from patients. Parsons draws upon his extensive experience as a surgeon and his involvement with EIDO (a provider of patient information resources) to highlight the legal, ethical, and practical aspects of consent. He emphasises the importance of a patient-centred approach, meaningful dialogue, and the utilisation of resources to support clinicians in this crucial area.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. The Foundational Importance of GMC Guidance on Consent:

- Parsons stresses the significance of the General Medical Council (GMC) guidance on consent, particularly the updated version from 2020. He encourages attendees to read it, highlighting that it underpins their obligations as clinicians.
- He focuses on the first four key principles of the GMC guidance (principles five to seven regarding capacity are not discussed):
- **Patient Involvement:** "all patients have a right to be involved in decisions about their treatment and care and to be supported to make informed decisions if they're able."
- **Ongoing Process and Meaningful Dialogue:** Decision-making is not a one-off event but "an ongoing process focused on a meaningful dialogue and the exchange of relevant information specific to the individual patient."
- **Right to Information and Understanding:** Patients have "the right to be listened to and to be given information that they need to make a decision and the time and support that they need to understand it."
- **Understanding What Matters to the Patient:** "doctors must try to find out what matters to the patient," a principle reinforced by the Montgomery ruling.

2. Legal Obligations and the Avoidance of Litigation:

- Parsons underscores that the GMC guidance carries legal weight. Where it states "you must," this is "because it's embedded in law."
- Failure to fulfil these obligations can lead to legal repercussions, something "we all want to avoid."

3. The Core Information Required for Informed Consent:

- Parsons outlines the crucial information clinicians *must* provide to patients, including:
- Diagnosis and prognosis.
- Uncertainties surrounding the diagnosis and prognosis.
- Available treatment options, including the option of no treatment.
- The nature of each treatment option.
- The benefits and risks of harm associated with each option.
- Uncertainties associated with each option.

4. The Role of EIDO in Supporting the Consent Process:

- Parsons, as a co-founder of EIDO, positions the organisation as a tool to aid clinicians in providing comprehensive and understandable information. He acknowledges the challenges of conducting thorough consent discussions within time constraints and the potential for using medical jargon.
- EIDO resources aim to explain:
- The medical problem.
- Different treatment options and alternatives.
- What surgery (in his context) involves.
- Risks and complications.
- Benefits.
- Post-operative expectations.
- Lifestyle changes to aid recovery.
- He clarifies that EIDO is a support tool and "cannot replace a meaningful dialogue." It provides the "standard information that they need to come armed with," freeing up consultation time for personalised discussion.

5. The Importance of Meaningful Dialogue and Patient-Centred Care:

- Parsons repeatedly emphasises the need for a "meaningful dialogue" with patients.
- He advocates for spending consultation time "asking the questions, finding out what's important to the patients, finding out, you know, what hobbies they have and what profession they're in, and the risks they're prepared to take so that I can tailor my information for them."
- Understanding the patient's individual circumstances and priorities is crucial for truly informed consent.

6. Supporting Patients' Understanding and Decision-Making:

- Providing information in an accessible format is vital. Parsons highlights the availability of:
- Translations.
- Easy read versions for patients with learning difficulties.
- Large and giant print versions for visually impaired individuals.
- Animations on digital platforms.
- The shift to digital platforms offers significant advantages over "faded, multiply photocopied black and white versions."
- It is also important to "be able to check back that understanding" to ensure the patient comprehends the information provided.

7. The Role of the Healthcare Team in the Consent Process:

- In a large team setting, Parsons acknowledges that he may not be the first point of contact for patients. He relies on his team to have already provided EIDO information and initiated the meaningful dialogue. His role may then be to "just confirm consent on the day of surgery," making the process more efficient.

8. Delegated Consent and the Training of Trainees:

- Delegated consent to trainees is permissible under GMC guidance, provided the trainee is "trained in consent."
- EIDO offers its own informed consent training package.
- Trainees must have the necessary skills and written information to support their discussions but should also have access to consultant support for complex questions or situations beyond their competency. "If you are a trainee, please act within your area of competency. and if you find you're out of your depth, then ask for help and your team should support you."

9. Importance of Good Medical Record Keeping:

- Accurate documentation of the consent process is essential for medico-legal purposes. Parsons advises trainees to "refer to the information that you've given on the consent form so that we have medico-legal evidence that the patient has received an EIDO document."
- He personally documents the sharing of information in clinic letters to both the patient and their GP.

10. Considering Changes in Patient Circumstances:

- For patients on long waiting lists, their condition or personal circumstances may have changed. Clinicians must be aware of this and "consider that on the day" of the procedure, ensuring the decision-making process remains valid.

11. The Hospital Trust's Responsibility to Support the Consent Process:

- The GMC makes it clear that hospital trusts have "an obligation to support you in the consent process," including providing access to validated information.
- Parsons notes the GMC's suggestion that clinicians could raise concerns if this support is lacking.

Conclusion:

Simon Parsons provides a comprehensive overview of the principles and practicalities of obtaining informed consent. He stresses the centrality of the GMC guidance, the legal ramifications of inadequate consent, and the importance of a patient-centred approach built on meaningful dialogue. He highlights the role of resources like EIDO in supporting this process but firmly states that they are not a substitute for direct communication and understanding the individual needs and values of each patient. The presentation underscores the shared responsibility of the clinical team and the healthcare organisation in ensuring that informed consent is obtained ethically and effectively.