

PATIENT RIGHTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

ALL MEDICAL CARE IS YOUR CHOICE

Every competent adult patient has the legal right to decide whether to accept or reject any medical care—even emergency or life-saving care.

GET THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

Doctors have a legal obligation to give you whatever information you need to make your decisions about medical care. Ask your doctor:

- Whether it is possible (and how) to diagnose the cause of your medical problem
- To explain your medical condition
- What treatments are possible, how they work, and how they compare
- What are the risks and side effects of different treatments
- Whether any treatment is really experimental (“investigational” or part of a clinical trial)
- What you can expect if you don’t have treatment
- What the doctor recommends and why
- What doctor or hospital should perform the treatment, and how much experience and success they have in performing it

Unless it is an emergency, take as long as you need to make your own decision. Get another opinion if you like.

PATIENTS HAVE NO LEGAL DUTY TO SIGN CONSENT FORMS

Doctors and hospitals ask patients to sign forms as evidence that patients have agreed to treatment. You are free to sign a form, but make sure it accurately describes what you have already been told, and keep a copy for yourself, especially if it describes what to do if problems arise.

BRING A FRIEND TO THE DOCTOR

A friend or family member can offer valuable support, ask questions you may forget, and write down answers for future reference. Choose someone familiar with medicine or health care who can help you if you cannot help yourself.

Many hospitals have patient advocates—usually hospital employees—to help patients with problems. Many states have independent ombudspersons to help all patients.

Parents should be able to stay with their children in the hospital 24 hours a day.

PATIENTS ARE ENTITLED TO PRIVACY. PATIENTS HAVE THE LEGAL RIGHT TO REFUSE TO HAVE ANYONE BUT THEIR DOCTOR PARTICIPATE IN TREATMENT

Patients are not required to allow interns, residents, researchers, medical students or anyone else to be present when they are examined or treated.

Patients have the right to refuse to participate in educational and research programs.

Everyone who takes care of you should identify him/herself and his/her role in your care.

PATIENTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO OBTAIN A COPY OF THEIR MEDICAL RECORDS

You may be asked to pay a reasonable copying fee.

PATIENTS HAVE THE RIGHT NOT TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, OR DISABILITY

*PATIENT RIGHTS PROGRAM
BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
HEALTH LAW DEPARTMENT
www.patient-rights.org*