

Patient Attitudes Regarding Consent for Emergency Department Computed Tomography Scans

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Patient Attitudes Regarding Consent for Emergency Department Computed Tomography Scans

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Objective:

With increasing awareness of physicians and layperson in regards to the radiation exposure associated with computed tomography (CT) scans, it is unclear whether a formal patient consent process for CT's should exist. The existing literature does not reflect the current attitudes of patients regarding this important issue. We set out to assess patient attitudes about obtaining informed consent regarding emergency department (ED) CT scans.

Methods:

In this pilot study, surveys were distributed over a two month period in fiscal year 2010 by utilizing a convenience sample of patients during weekday hours in a tertiary, suburban level-one trauma center with a yearly census of 74,000 patients. Historically, in this same fiscal year at this site, patients received a CT scan on 25% of their ED visits. Using simple frequency and proportions, we evaluated patients' attitudes regarding obtaining informed consent prior to performing CT scans in the ED. After obtaining IRB approval, a convenience sample of approximately fifty surveys was obtained which represented a 90% return rate of surveys distributed. Either an ED registrar or a research assistant filled in the triage level on the survey and then gave the survey to the patient or patient's surrogate to complete. A brief explanation of the study was provided to ensure that participation was voluntary and that subjects were reassured as to the anonymity of their response. The survey consisted of seventeen yes/no or multiple-choice questions, five of which were demographic questions. When completed, the surveys were placed in a sealed envelope and returned to research staff or by mail to the research department.

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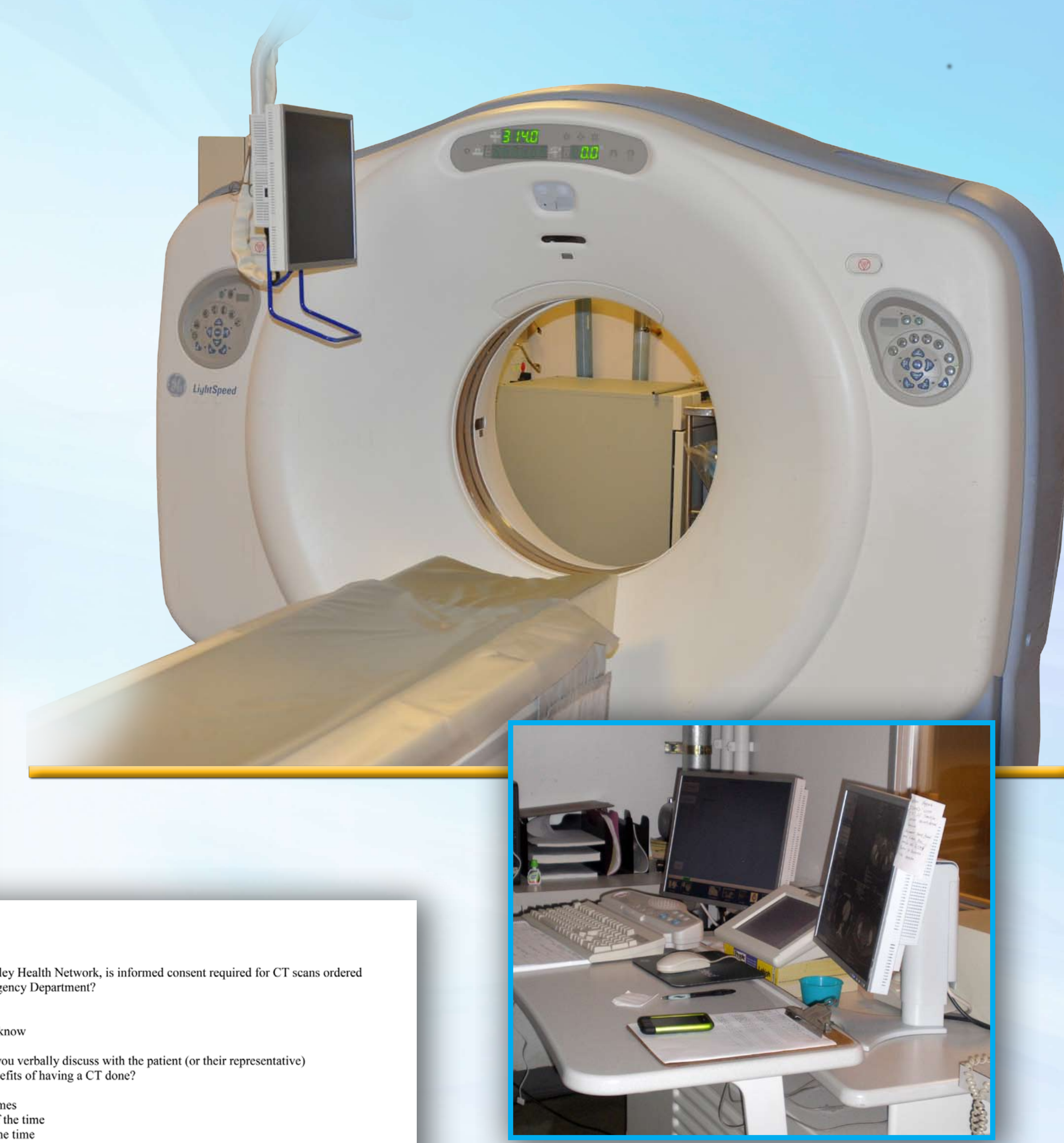
You are being asked to participate in a research study that evaluates the attitudes physicians may have about obtaining informed consent before a patient has a CT done in the Emergency Department. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not you want to participate. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. By completing this anonymous survey you agree to participate and understand the data we collect will be used to answer our research questions. Documentation of your consent will not be obtained. No information is being collected that will identify you to the researcher. After completing the survey, please return it in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. In the event that you do not want to complete the survey for research purposes, and feel that this may put you under emotional stress or not complying with health professional or educator request, you may enclose a blank survey in the sealed envelope and return it. If you have any questions regarding this study you may contact Dr. Michael Weigner by phone at 610-402-8128.

Physician Survey (Part 1)
Please circle the most appropriate answer to the questions below:

- 1) What description best describes your level of training?
a. PCV1 skip to question 2
b. PCV2 skip to question 3
c. PCV3 skip to question 4
d. PCV4 skip to question 5
e. Attending
- 2) If you are an attending, how many years (post residency) have you been practicing medicine?
a. <2
b. 3-5
c. 6-10
d. 11-15
e. 16 or greater
- 3) What is your age?
a. 20-29 years
b. 30-39 years
c. 40-49 years
d. 50-59 years
e. 60 years or older
- 4) Do you have children?
a. Yes
b. No

- 5) What is your gender?
a. Female (please also answer 5a)
b. Male (go to question 6)
5a) Females: Are you either pregnant or think you may be?
a. Yes
b. No
- 6) Are you Hispanic or Latino?
a. Yes
b. No
c. Don't know/not sure
- 7) Which one or more of the following would you say is your race?
a. White
b. Black or African American
c. Asian
d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
e. Other
- 8) On average, how many CT scans do you order on a shift? (Consider a trauma patient that has CT scans of the head, c-spine, chest, abdomen, and pelvis. This equals 5 scans)
a. 0-3
b. 4-6
c. 7-10
d. >10
- 9) What type of CT scans do you order most frequently?
a. Head
b. C-spine
c. Chest
d. Abdomen/Pelvis (contrast)
e. Abdomen/Pelvis (no contrast; stone protocol)
- 10) For what chief complaint do you order CT scans the most?
a. Trauma
b. Shortness of breath and/or Chest Pain
c. Abdominal pain
d. Other

- 11) At Lehigh Valley Health Network, is informed consent required for CT scans ordered from the Emergency Department?
a. Yes
b. No
c. I don't know
- 12) How often do you verbally discuss with the patient (or their representative) the risks or benefits of having a CT done?
a. Never
b. Sometimes
c. Most of the time
d. All of the time
- 13) Informed consent is a process of communication between a patient and health care provider that results in the patient's authorization or agreement to undergo a specific medical intervention. Do you think that patients should give their informed consent before they get a CT scan in the Emergency Department?
a. Yes
b. No
- 14) Patients can give informed consent for CT's in different ways: Patients could just tell the physician that they agree to have the CT scan (verbal consent). Patients could be required to sign a paper right before they have the CT scan that says they agree to have it (written consent specific to the CT scan they are to get in the Emergency Department). Or, patients could be required to sign a paper that says they agree to have the CT scan as part of the treatment for their health problem. This paper could be signed at any time before the Emergency Department visit and include any CT scans that might be recommended by physicians treating the patient (general consent signed when the patient consented to be treated).
Which type of informed consent do you feel is appropriate for a CT scan in the Emergency Department?
a. General consent signed when your patient consents to be treated
b. Verbal consent specific to the CT scan your patient is about to have in the Emergency department
c. Written consent specific to the CT scan your patient is about to have in the Emergency department
d. I don't think the patients' informed consent is necessary



Results:

The median respondent age was 60 years or older, with a nearly even proportion of men to women (51%:49%). Ninety percent identified themselves as white or non-Hispanic or non-Latino. Ten percent identified themselves as black, African American or other. Ninety-eight percent identified english as his or her primary language. The majority (71%, 36/51) of survey respondents were high school graduates or had some college. Seventy-three percent (35/48) of the subjects did not expect to get a CT and 27% (13/48) did expect to receive a CT during their ED visit on the day they were surveyed. Seventy-three percent (36/49) of respondents felt that patients in the ED should give informed consent before they get a CT scan in the ED and eighty-six percent (42/49) felt either comfortable or very comfortable letting the ED doctor decide if a patient needs a CT scan. Only six percent (3/49) either had themselves or had known of anyone having a problem that was caused by a CT scan.

Conclusions:

Based on this pilot study, the majority of emergency department patients feel informed consent should occur before receiving a CT scan and most patients feel comfortable letting the doctor make the decision regarding the need for a CT scan.