

User testing of new infographic resources in obstetric regional anaesthesia to improve the maternal consenting process

Dr Thomas Gower¹, Dr George Clews², Dr Samantha Black³

1 Anaesthetist, Medway NHS Foundation Trust, Gillingham, United Kingdom

2 Anaesthetist, Medway NHS Foundation Trust, Gillingham, United Kingdom

3 Consultant Anaesthetist, Medway NHS Foundation Trust, Gillingham, United Kingdom and Patient Information Lead, RCoA



INTRODUCTION

- The 2015 *Montgomery vs Lanarkshire Health Board* case established that doctors should inform patients of all material risks during the consenting process[1], which is reflected in the latest General Medical Council guidance on decision making and consent[2].
- Unfortunately, it has long been the concern of obstetric anaesthetists that labouring women are given information regarding spinal and epidural anaesthesia in a time-pressured, pain altered environment that can hinder the creation of the conditions required for truly informed consent.
- Concerns regarding this have been frequently expressed, including recently by Nitzani et al. [3], who found that the pain and exhaustion of labour combined with the inadequate and untimely information provided undermined the implementation of informed consent
- These issues are likely only exacerbated in mother’s with lower health literacy, an important consideration as in the UK 7.1 million adults read and write at or below the level of a nine-year-old and 43% of adults do not understand written health information [4]
- There is, therefore, an urgent need to re-examine the informed consent process for neuraxial anaesthesia and analgesia to ensure that labouring mother’s are given the best support when making these complex and important decisions
- To this end the Royal College of Anaesthetists, who are at the forefront of the creation of risk infographics to aid consent discussions, produced 2 new infographics regarding the provision of epidural and spinal anaesthesia, which underwent user testing in the maternity department of a district general hospital
- They were produced in partnership with the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication, the OAA and have been certified by the Patient Information Forum Trusted Information Creator Kitemark (PIF TICK).



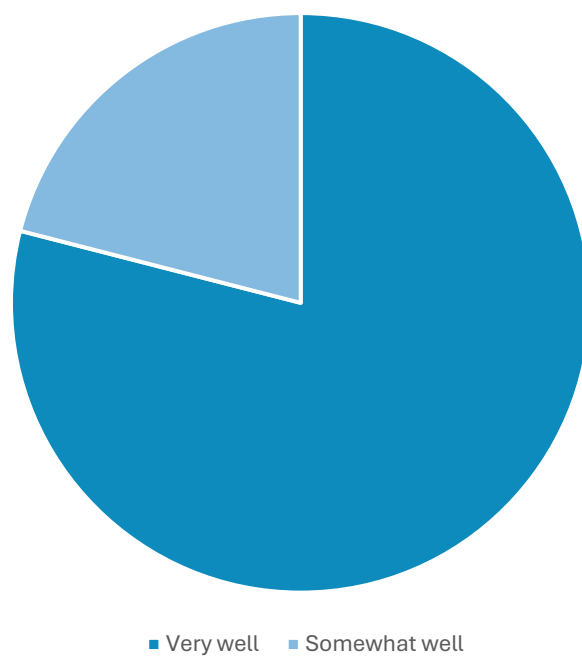
METHODS

- 3 questionnaires were created to test the response to the infographics in 3 cohorts: patients; midwives and anaesthetists
- These questionnaires focused on understanding of information, as well as the language used and visual aspect, before giving the chance to add further comments
- User testing was carried out over a 3 week period
- Each cohort was given time to examine the relevant resource before being given a bespoke questionnaire collecting information on a number of aspects of the resource

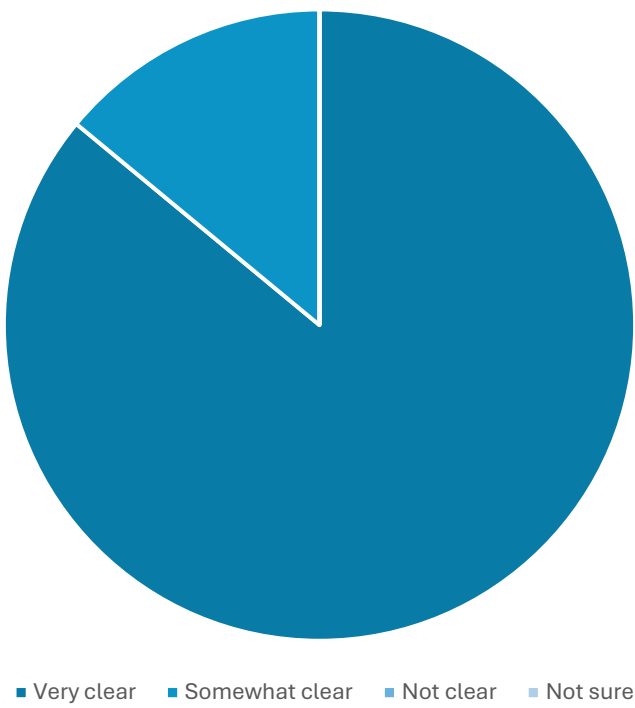
RESULTS

A total of 14 patients and 11 midwives or anaesthetists were surveyed.

After reading the infographics, how well do you feel you understand the information?

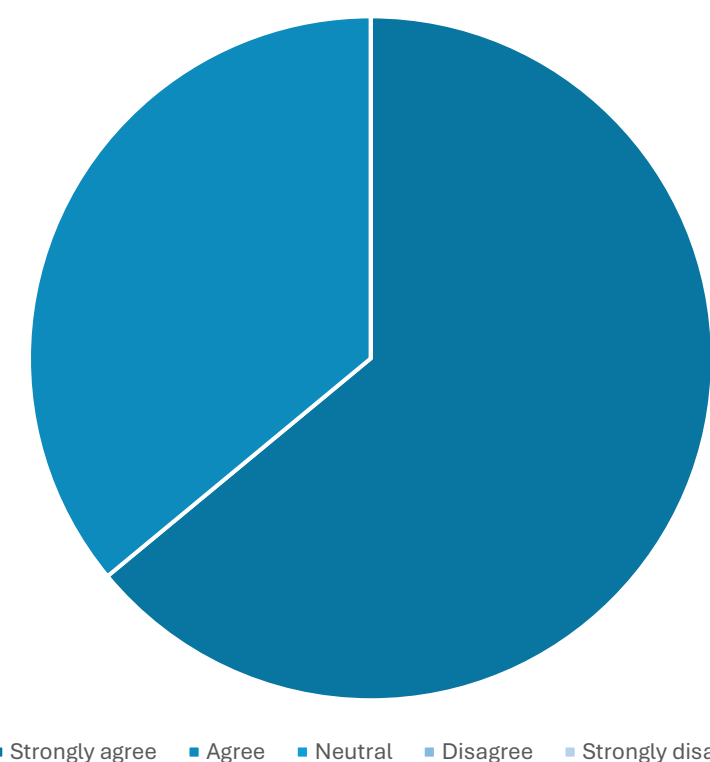


How clear was the explanation of the different types and likelihood of risks for both procedures?

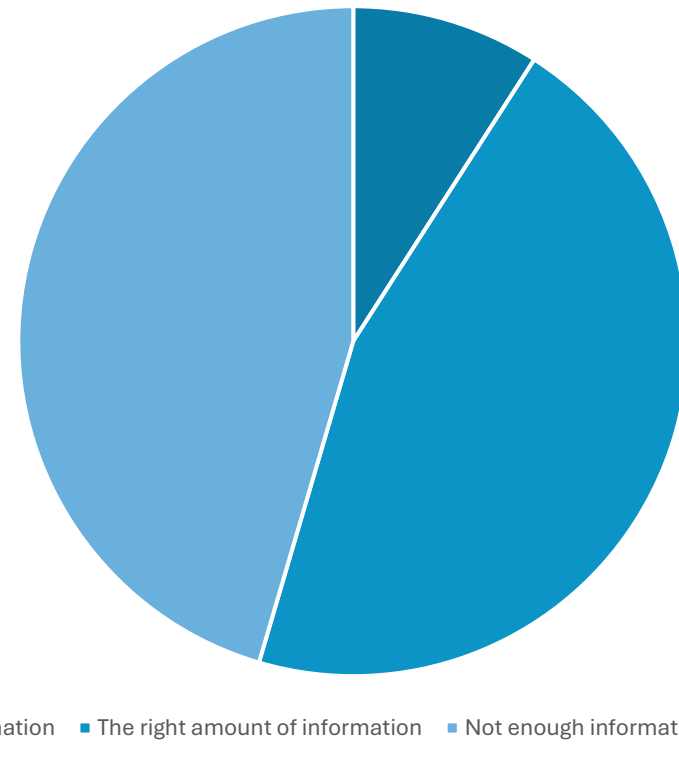


- 100% of the patients surveyed felt that the leaflets helped them feel more confident discussing anaesthetic options with a healthcare professional
- 100% of the patients surveyed found the language easy to understand
- 100% of the patients, anaesthetists and midwives surveyed found the language respectful and appropriate for their cultural or personal background
- 100% of the patients surveyed found the images and icons respectful and appropriate for their culture or personal background
- 100% of the patients surveyed would recommend these leaflets to someone considering spinal or epidural anaesthesia
- 100% of midwives and anaesthetists felt that it was most appropriate for pregnant mothers to receive this information at some point antenatally BEFORE their labour
- 100% of midwives would be happy to give these resources to a patient before calling for an anaesthetist to complete formal consenting

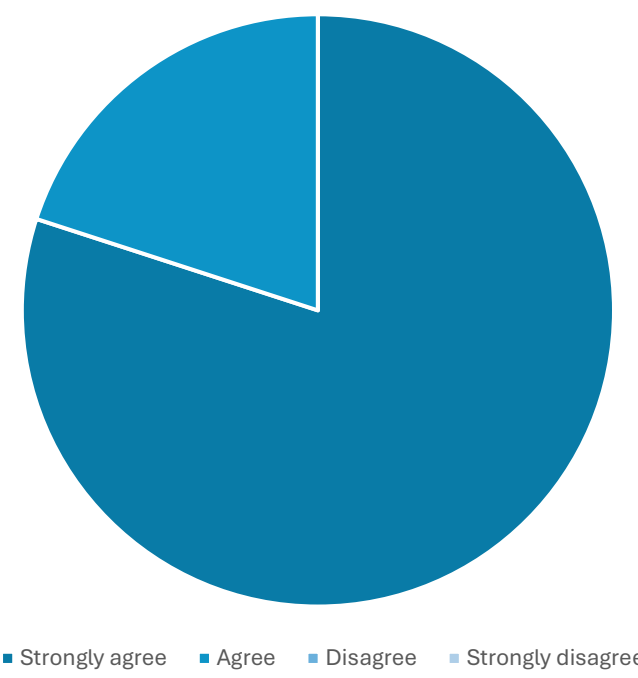
The introduction of these resources would improve the standard of patient education regarding neuraxial anaesthesia



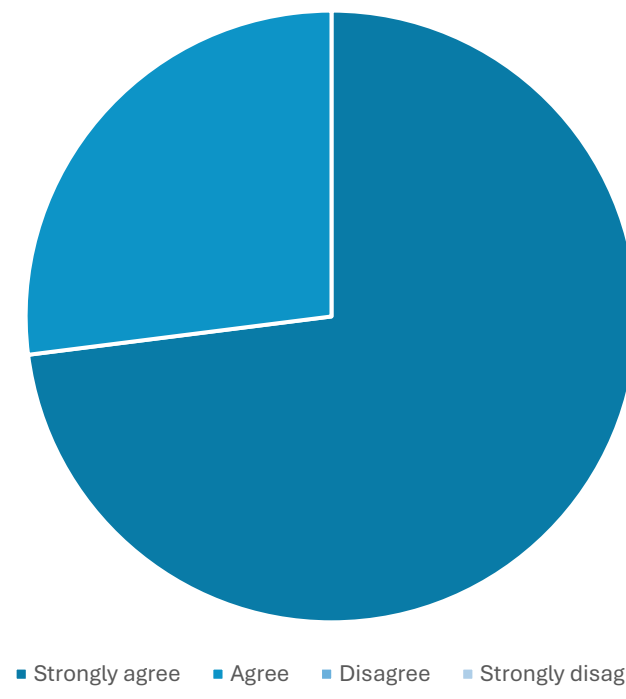
Currently the information given to patients I have provided care for regarding neuraxial anaesthesia antenatally is...



I would incorporate these resources into my day to day practice



The information in the resources is presented in a way that would positively add to the effectiveness of the consenting process



DISCUSSION

- Our user testing found that the 2 new infographics presented easily understood information to patients and assisted significantly in improving their experience of the consenting process.
- Importantly all found that the information, images and icons was provided in a way that was accessibly to all cultures and backgrounds, making it accessible to all
- The majority of women (64%) found that the provision of this information reassured them, showing that by empowering women to make informed consent decisions makes a positive impact on their birth experience. Benefit can be provided even to those not planning neuraxial anaesthesia or analgesia, as circumstances in labour can change quickly
- They found the information accessible and reported increased confidence to advocate for themselves afterwards.
- Medical professional feedback was that this resource should be introduced before labouring mothers are faced with the requirement for the procedure to be performed

REFERENCES

[1] The Supreme Court (2015). *Montgomery (Appellant) v Lanarkshire Health Board (Respondent) (Scotland) - UK Supreme Court*. [online] Supremecourt.uk. Available at: <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2013-0136> [Accessed 20 Jun. 2025].

[2] General Medical Council (GMC) (2020). *Decision making and consent*. [online] Gmc-uk.org. Available at: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/professional-standards/the-professional-standards/decision-making-and-consent>. [Accessed 20 Jun 2025]

[3] Nitzani, D., Nicholls, J., Maslowski, K., et al. (2025), Patient perception of consent processes for epidural analgesia in induction of labour: a qualitative study. *Anaesthesia*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anae.16637>

[4] Wheeler, R., Kuhn, L., Classick, R., et al (2024). *Survey of Adult Skills 2023 (PIAAC): National Report for England*. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675330e020bcf083762a6d48/Survey_of_Adult_Skills_2023__PIAAC__National_Report_for_England.pdf. [Accessed 20 Jun 2025]