Informed Consent

Informed consent is a legal doctrine, a document whereby the patient signifies that they have given consent, based on an appreciation and understanding of the purpose, alternatives, risks, and benefits of a planned medical intervention. However, consent is not simply a written document for the patient to sign, but an opportunity for the patient and surgeon to have a discussion about the planned procedure, and answer the patient’s questions surrounding the surgery. This discussion empowers the patient with the information they need to make an informed decision, so it is of paramount importance that the patient or their health care proxy truly understands the procedure and it’s purpose, risks and benefits. During this discussion important information to discuss and disclose includes:

- Patient’s diagnosis, if known
- Nature and purpose of the surgery
- Risks and benefits of the proposed surgery or procedure
- All available alternatives
- Risks and benefits of the alternatives
- The risks and benefits of not undergoing the procedure

Informed consent is:

- A process of shared decision making by the patient and physician
- An active communicative process
- Educational discussion for physician and patient
- Goal of building trust and mutual respect

The responsible physician can verify the patient truly understands by having them repeat in their own words the procedure, why they are having it, and what the risks, benefits, and alternatives of it are.

The patient must also be given the opportunity to ask questions to gain a better understanding of the surgery. This discussion and documentation is both an ethical obligation of the surgeon and a legal requirement in all 50 US states. As a physician, good documentation of the communication process is a crucial aspect of the practice of modern medicine. Complete and accurate documentation can serve as evidence in a court of law that the informed consent process took place.

In the case of the exploratory laparotomy and lysis of adhesions, the patient must understand the following risks:

- Bleeding
- Infection, either intra abdominal or incisional
- Injury to adjacent structures such as the bladder, intestinal track
- Recurrent bowel obstruction
- Possible bowel resection
- Rarely possible colostomy
*Please see attached sheet for example of a typical surgical consent form for a patient undergoing exploratory laparotomy and lysis of adhesions for SBO.