Having your photograph taken

CMC
Clinical Media Centre

CMC – visualising health
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Why have I been asked to have my photograph taken?

It may have been a surprise to you to be asked to have your photograph taken whilst in hospital but in fact this is not an unusual request. In Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals (BSUH) thousands of patients are photographed by clinical photographers from the Clinical Media Centre every year.

It is most likely that your photographs will be used as a pictorial record of your condition and will form a part of your notes so that the progress of your illness or disease can be monitored visually along with any other tests which may be done.

This will mean that the doctor or other health professional can return to the notes and look at the photographs on any subsequent visits to see how your condition has changed.

Some photographs such as those of certain eye conditions are used to help the doctor understand exactly what is happening and in these cases the photographs help a doctor make the decision on the best treatment for that particular patient.

Clinical photographs can also be used in the planning of operations, often alongside other tests such as x-rays.
How else may they be used?

The old saying ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ is never more true than in medicine and clinical photographs play a vital role in the teaching of students and junior staff in many medical professions, particularly doctors. Therefore, you may be asked if your photographs can be used for teaching purposes.

A major part of education for medical staff makes use of text books and journals and increasingly the internet and on-line teaching, so it is possible that you will be asked if your photographs can be used for publication too. If you have consented to your photographs being used for publication it may then be difficult to withdraw the photographs once published. Your doctor should be specific about where your photographs would be published if that is why they have requested them.

Does this mean my condition is serious or very unusual?

Many very common conditions are photographed regularly and so although you have been asked to have your photograph taken this does not necessarily mean your condition is serious or very unusual and should not be a cause of worry.
Do I have to have my photograph taken?

Your doctor should have explained the reasons for having the photographs taken but you are under no obligation to have this done and can refuse at any point.

Even if you decide afterwards that you would prefer not to have the photographs in your notes you can ask to have them removed. However, it is important to remember that there is usually a good reason your doctor has asked for the photographs and so it is a good idea to discuss this with them.

Consent

You will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm that you agree to having your photograph taken and that you understand what the photographs may be used for.

There are three levels of consent:

1. As part of your confidential clinical records
2. For medical teaching purposes
3. For publication in textbooks, journals, medical articles or on medical related websites on the internet.

You can choose to agree to one, two or all three of these, but the specific use of your photographs will have been discussed with you beforehand.
Who will see my photograph?

Your photographs will be seen by the clinical photographer who takes it and possibly other members of the clinical photography team as they process the images and get them to your notes.

Once they are in your notes only health professionals who are involved with your treatment will see them. If you have agreed that your photographs may to be used for teaching then they may be seen by health professionals in training such as student or junior doctors or nurses.

If you have agreed to the photographs being published, then your photographs may appear in a medical textbook or journal or on a medical teaching website. You will be given specific details of where the photographs will appear if they are going to be used for publication.

Can I request a copy of my photograph?

You can ask for a copy of your photographs. Sometimes depending on the conditions being photographed the doctor will ask that the patient has a copy to keep at home to help monitor the condition.

If this has not been requested by the doctor and you just want a copy for yourself then you need to apply for a copy in the same way as you would ask for a copy of any of your clinical notes.

To do this contact:

The Health Records Manager
Royal Sussex County Hospital
Eastern Road
Brighton, BN2 5BE
If you do not understand this leaflet, we can arrange for an interpreter.

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Disclaimer
The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

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