



ETHICS

# PATIENT CONSENT FOR CLINICAL PHOTOGRAPHY: INDIAN DERMATOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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**Introduction:** Photography in several clinical disciplines is essential for treatment planning, documentation, patient counseling and follow-up. The clinician's obligations to respect the patient's rights of autonomy and confidentiality must be balanced against the benefits of clinical photography.

**Objective:** To review Indian Dermatology journal guidelines for clinical photography.

**Materials and methods:** Review of national guidelines and Indian dermatology journal instructions on maintaining patient confidentiality for clinical photographs and its subsequent dissemination to a scientific audience through journal publications.

**Results:** The National Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical and Health Research involving human participants and Code of Medical Ethics emphasize the fact that publication of photographs without consent by patients is prohibited. The guidelines mention that, any publication arising out of research should uphold the privacy of the individuals by ensuring that photographs or other information that may reveal the individual's identity are not published.

The Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology, and Leprology, The Indian Journal of Dermatology and the Indian Dermatology Online Journal have clearly elucidated their policy on protection of patients' right to privacy in their webpage on instructions to authors. The journals mandate obtaining written informed consent and uploading a scanned copy of the declaration at the time of submission. They also specify that the authors should disclose to these patients whether any potential identifiable material would be available via the Internet as well as in print after publication. They require that the patient has been made aware of the details of the usage, including how the images would appear, and to what extent the images would be distributed.

**Conclusions:** Although clinical guidelines are in place, awareness generation among medical fraternity is essential. Unauthorized publication may affect the doctor-patient





relationship, breach ethical codes of conduct, cause psychological harm to the patient and have legal ramifications for the hospital and its staff.

