

CONCLUSIONS

Physicians and investigators need to be aware of ethical issues relevant to decision-making in patients with schizophrenia—a severe mental illness that can potentially diminish autonomy by interfering with the necessary prerequisites of decision-making capacity. Medical advances in the treatment of schizophrenia owe much to the willingness of patients with this disorder to participate in research. Patients with schizophrenia also must collaborate with their primary care physicians in treatment-related medical decision-making. Patients with schizophrenia or other mental illnesses should not be presumed a priori to lack decision-making capacity. Much still remains unknown about decision-making capacity in patients with schizophrenia in both research and treatment contexts. For example, further work should be done to explore the uses of enhanced consent procedures and decision aids in decision-making. Fortunately, research is underway to find ways to optimize decision-making abilities of patients with chronic mental illnesses. When a question about capacity arises, clinicians should strive to assess the component abilities of capacity. It should be emphasized, however, that there is no “magic formula” for determining capacity. When in doubt, consultation with a psychiatric colleague can be extremely helpful. **MI**

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