



ETHICAL DILEMMA-A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The case is a narration of real life unethical practices prevailing in the eye care treatment in New Delhi. Many private eye care clinics and hospitals have come up in New Delhi with the state of art infrastructure and eye treatment technology, resulting into hyper competition amongst the hospitals. There exists huge demand for eye care treatment in India in general and New Delhi in particular. Large numbers of people in India are suffering from weak eye sight and defective vision because of unhealthy life styles and visualization habits. In India people don't prefer to wear spectacles particularly the youths, as it is perceived to spoil the looks and diminish the aesthetics appeals of an individual. To increase the revenues and profits, private hospitals adopt unethical and unhealthy treatment practices and duly exploiting the patients monetary.

KEYWORDS :**Introduction:**

This incident goes back to time of my first job at XYZ EYE INSTITUTE in south extension, New Delhi in 1999. I was fresh out of college and was very enthusiastic to try out all the theoretical knowledge gained during our academic program. I wanted to gain more experience in contact lens fitting. Through a friend I came to know that there was an opening for an optometrist in the contact lens department of a large eye hospital in Delhi.

I applied for the same and was selected after the interview. I had a time horizon of 6 months to work at the institute to gain some practical experience in fitting of contact lenses in complicated cases. Things started quite well as I was impressed with the infrastructure and systems adopted by the institute. They had state of the art equipments and I was very enthusiastic to work using such hi tech devices.

Services:

The institute had also recently started with PRK (photo refractive keratectomy and LASIK), commonly called as LASER to remove the refractive error (spectacle power) of an eye. I had to work in the (laser) PRK evaluation clinic every alternate day along with my core responsibility of fitting contact lenses. Delhi is very competitive market for eye care and there was a great pressure on the doctors to achieve 100% results and keep the patients happy. Also the institute was very keen on operating on maximum number of patients and had very competent counselors. These counselors were supposed to motivate all patients for the laser surgery and thus at times used to over promise regarding the outcome of the surgery. These counselors were provided extra incentive for every single enquiry which materialized into surgery.

Patients Complaints:

In some of the cases, after the surgery, the doctors faced an awkward situation. Some of the patients would complain why they could not see the last line on the vision chart, which actually was not very significant. The patients had the expectation of seeing the entire chart with each eye, which at times could not be achieved. This could happen with the best of surgeons anywhere in the world. However, since it was promised to the patients that their vision would be 100% without glasses, it resulted in some unhappy patients.

Doctors Resolution:

The senior doctors and director discussed the issue and came up with a unique solution. They simply blocked the last line on the chart by covering it with a tape. This solved the problem, as now; the patients felt that they were reading the entire chart whereas, actually, they were reading 6 lines instead of the standard 7 lines.

Dilemma:

Personally I felt quite uncomfortable with this approach. Doubts arose in my mind whether there were other issues as well on which quality was being compromised in the institute. Whether the procedures and techniques that we were learning regarding eye examination were conforming to standards? Was the institute resorting to short cuts and

cutting corners in these aspects too? As a result I shifted from being a full time employee to a part time employee after a month and joined All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) for the remaining half of the day.

Questions:

- 1) Do you feel the counselors were misleading the patients or patients were over demanding? Justify your answer.
- 2) Evaluate the decision of senior doctors in light of the case facts. Justify your answer.
- 3) If you were the senior doctor how would you resolve the problem?