



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Physiology

KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS ABOUT MEDICAL ETHICS IN MEDICAL STUDENTS, INTERNS AND RESIDENT DOCTORS

KEY WORDS: Medical Practice, Ethics, Interns, Students

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ABSTRACT

Aim and Objectives: To evaluate and compare the Knowledge and Awareness of principles of medical ethics among medical students, interns and resident doctors in a teaching tertiary care institute.

Materials and Methods: After obtaining valid informed consent, the 90 participants were recruited into the study. The participants included 30 third MBBS medical students, 30 interns and 30 resident doctors. They were asked to fill the pre-validated structured questionnaire on principles of medical research. The collected data from questionnaire forms were entered into Microsoft office excel 2007 and was expressed in frequency and percentage.

Results: We found that 100% interns and residents believe that knowledge of medical ethics is necessary, while only 85.7% medical students believe that this knowledge is necessary. 14.2% students and 47.4% interns only knew about Institutional Ethics committee, while 100% residents knew about it. While assessing knowledge on medical practice related medical ethics, 71.4% students, 51.8% interns and 26.7% residents agreed on confidentiality ie Information of Patient's condition cannot be diverted to his spouse or parents.

Conclusion: Even though the medical ethics has been included in the syllabus of MBBS by Medical council of India the knowledge about the ethical issues was varied among students, interns and resident doctors. Medical students must be encouraged to practice ethical medical practice right from first year and the knowledge must be reinforced time to time till he is practising.

Background: As per Medical Council of India, the principle objective of the medical profession is to render service to humanity with full respect for the dignity of Profession and also to the humanity. A Physician should expose, without fear or favour, incompetent or corrupt, dishonest or unethical conduct on the part of members of the profession. With the advances in recent science and technology and increased awareness about diseases and treatment through media or internet, the patients and families have a keen observation on the health professionals with respect to the treatment and care given to them. In India nowadays doctor patient relationship is deteriorating. The recent increase in litigation against doctors is an issue of immediate concern which says that Doctors and health professionals are confronted with many ethical problems regularly. This is because lack of patient doctor communication, malpractice in medical field like cut practice, lack of awareness, knowledge about medical ethics in doctors. In India, formal teaching of medical ethics at the undergraduate levels is done as part of medical jurisprudence in second MBBS. However, medical students do not have much interest in learning about medical ethics as they consider other subjects to be more important for qualifying for examinations. Thus to get patients trust back on doctors, it is necessary to have knowledge and awareness education about medical ethics right from MBBS level. Hence this study was undertaken with the objective of evaluation and comparison of Knowledge and Awareness of principles of medical ethics among medical students, interns and resident doctors in a teaching tertiary care institute.

Materials and Methods: After obtaining valid informed consent, the 90 participants were recruited into the study. The participants included 30 final year MBBS medical students, 30 interns and 30 resident doctors from B.J.G. Medical College and Sassoon General Hospital in Pune, Maharashtra. They were asked to fill the pre-validated structured questionnaire on principles of medical research. The collected data from questionnaire forms were entered into Microsoft office excel 2007 and was expressed in frequency and percentage.

Results and Discussion:

Knowledge of medical students about ethics

	Students Percentage (%)	Interns %	Residents %
Is it necessary to have knowledge regarding ethical issues in medical profession	Yes 100 No 0 Don't know 0	100 0 0	100 0 0
Source of your knowledge	Lecture class 58.5 Workshops 2.1 Conferences 3.5 Journals 4 Mass media 35.7	60 48 75 90	58.7 75 90
Is there an ethical committee in your institution	Yes 14.2 No 85.5 Don't know 57.1	47.4 8.6 44	100 0 0
Preference in consulting an ethical problem	Colleagues 42.8 Guide 32.8 Ethics committee 26.6 Textbooks 1.5 Internet 3.5	26 20 64 16 16	81.2 43.8 62.5 96.2
Do you have interest in learning healthcare ethics?	Yes 89.2 No 10.7	79.6 20.4	64.7 35.3
Do not avoid even if patient wishes to die?	Yes 17.8 No 78.5 Don't know 3.5	45.8 56.2 5	81.2 96.2
Is it legal to do blood test determination in India?	Yes 7.1 No 90 Don't know 42.8	15.4 75.3 8.3	0 94.1 42.9
Do you know cut practice?	Yes 14.2 No 85.5 Don't know 52.1	47.6 24.3 8.1	62.5 12.5 25

Patient-Doctor Relationship

	Students Percentage (%)	Interns %	Residents %
Patients wishes must always be adhere to	Yes 80.7 No 19.7 Don't know 3.5	86.4 9.6 5	66.6 35.4
Patient should be informed about any misconduct	Yes 85.7 No 7.1 Don't know 7.1	83.7 8.3 100	83.3 6.7 66.7
Paraphernalia to be sold always, if any necessary? during treatment	Yes 100 No 0 Don't know 100	89.6 0 89.6	89 0 89
Doctors should refuse to treat the patient who behave violently	Yes 46.7 No 54.3 Don't know 3.6	62.5 35.4 16.1	20 62.5 63.7
In condition where disclosure of patient's condition may benefit the society, it is mandatory to inform the authorities	Yes 14.2 No 85.5 Don't know 28.7	4.2 12.4 0	6.3 0
Patient has right to seek second medical opinion	Yes 67.8 No 10.7 Don't know 21.5	87.3 4.3 8.4	83.7 4.3 6.8
Will you treat the patient if it unable to pay medical expense?	Yes 89.2 No 10.7 Don't know 0	60.6 7.8 31.8	60 13.4 26.6
If there is disagreement between patient/relatives and healthcare professionals, doctors decision should be final	Yes 57.2 No 42.8	58.5 46.5	33.3 66.7

Practice

	Students Percentage (%)	Interns %	Residents %
Confidentiality is important in all aspects, i.e. information of Patient's condition can be diverted to his spouse or parents	Yes 71.5 No 28.5 Don't know 0	51.8 28.1 20	26.7 26.3
Physician may print his photographs along with his identification card	Yes 21.4 No 57.1 Don't know 21.9	43.7 28.2 32.1	46.7 58.8 6.7
Is it legal for a Physician to run an open shop for dispensing drugs and appliances prescribed by other doctors	Yes 15.7 No 67.8 Don't know 10.5	82.1 23.2 40.2	93.3 6.7
It's better to use brand name than generic name of drug	Yes 58.2 No 39.2 Don't know 7.2	15.8 48.1 100	40 60
It is always necessary for a physician to keep a copy of the records for 3 years	Yes 72.8 No 27.2 Don't know 25	96.1 96 0	80 40
Clinically confirmed cases should also undergo laboratory investigation as a routine	Yes 25.7 No 64.4 Don't know 17.9	72.8 16 11.2	60 6.7 33.3
Consent has to be taken always for examination, investigation, treatment and procedure, Verbal/Written	Yes 100 No 0 Don't know 7.3	100 0 0	100 0
Children should never be treated without consent of parent-	Yes 100 No 3.5 Don't know 3.5	98.8 4 6.7	93.3 0
If law allows abortion, doctors cannot refuse to do abortion-	Yes 10.7 No 89.2 Don't know 17.8	68.2 31.8 64.1	80 33.8 80
In your opinion do you think that doctors are influenced by drug companies, instrument/supplier/ pharma-	Yes 17.8 No 64.2 Don't know 18	64.1 15.6 15.6	80 33.8 6.7
Do you favour cut practice-	Yes 25 No 42.8 Don't know 32.2	34 54.8 19.2	20 26.7 51.8
There should be a lenient attitude when male doctor members handle carter-	Yes 92.8 No 7.2	81.8 8.2	100 0

Results and Discussion: In our study, we assessed and compared knowledge and Awareness about Medical Ethics in Medical Students, Interns and Resident Doctors in a B.J. Govt. Medical College and Sassoon General Hospitals - a tertiary care hospital and teaching institute. The objective of ethics education in medical institutes is to influence upon the student the moral nature of the art and science of medicine and to make aware the learner to ethical issues.

In our study, we assessed the knowledge of medical ethics. We found that 100% interns and residents believe that knowledge of medical ethics is necessary, while only 85.7% medical students believe that this knowledge is necessary. While 52.7 % medical students in a study by Angadi et al in Karnataka of the respondents were of the opinion that knowledge of medical ethics is necessary.² Study by Raje et al showed that 90 % Interns are aware about ethics in medical practice in Nagpur.³

14.2 % students and 47.4% interns only knew about Institutional Ethics committee, while 100% residents knew about it. This is probably because the residents have to do their dissertations during their post graduation course. Before starting dissertation or any research project, approval of Ethics Committee is very important. Interns and students are generally less interested in research. Around 28(20.6%) percent of the students were aware about the existence of ethical committee in their institution and its activities in a study by Angadi et al.² Whereas in a study by Mohammad et al in Aligarh showed that only 48.5% residents were aware about institutional ethics committee.⁴

When we assessed sources of knowledge, we found that lectures class remain the most important sources for students(53.5%), interns(60%) and Residents(93.7%). Residents are also exposed to workshops(75%), conferences(50) and Mass media(68.7%) . This shows that our curricular training regarding Medical ethics is adequate for the residents. Students receive limited formal training in ethics during their college hours. In a study by Angadi M et al source of knowledge were textbooks(80.1%) ,lecture classes (55.1%) and mass media (25.8%) for the students.² According to a study by Mohammad M et al books & journals are the preferred mode for residents.⁴

In our study, for solving ethical problem, colleagues (81.2) and guides(93.7) remain the preferred choices for residents. This shows healthy student-guide relationship in our institute.

In our study, 89.2% students have interest in learning medical ethics which decreases to 79.6% in interns and 64.7% in residents. This could be because interns and residents become busy in their hospital work.

The concept of Euthanasia is not clear in students, but 43.8% interns and 51.2% residents do not believe in euthanasia. This is in accordance with a study by Chatterji et al in which 10.8% students favoured euthanasia.⁵

94.1% residents believe that foetal sex determination is not legal in India, while awareness in students and interns is 50% and 76.3% only respectively. Very few studies have done this survey in students, interns and residents.

Cut practice is Practical adjustments in clinical and therapeutic decisions and encounters, which offers fee sharing for referral of patients. ('cut practice'). PA KALE. ⁶ Knowledge of cut practice is almost similar in students(64.2), interns(67.6) and residents(62.5%).

When we assessed Patient-Doctor Relationship, the results are varied. 66.6% residents believe that patient's wishes must be given priority, while only 10% students and 36.4% interns feel the same. This shows that practical approach towards patients is changing from students to residents. Around 66.6% of the residents said they would always adhere to the patient's wishes during practice, while only 10.7% students and 36.4% interns feel so. These findings are comparable to the study done by Dash et al ⁷

where 65.1% and Mohammed et al ⁴ where 57.8% of the students were of the same opinion .

82.1% students, 100% interns and 66.7% residents feel that if misconduct happens during treatment, then parents or guardians must be informed.

85.7% students, 83.7% interns and 53.3% residents feel that patient should be informed about any misconduct. This is in accordance with study by Angadi et al ² where 81.6% students believe so and study by Adhikari et al ⁸ 83% residents feel so.

In our study 50% students, 31.6 % interns and 80% residents feel that it is fair not to treat patient if patient behaves violently. This is in contrast with study by Angadi et al where 22.8% students believe so.² This could be because of increase in violence against doctors.

Majority of residents (93.7%) thinks that it is mandatory to inform the authority where disclosure of patients/condition may benefit the society, while 83.4% interns and 57.1% students feel so. This shows that doctors become more aware about their social responsibility during student life to residency.

93.7% residents, 87.3% interns and only 67.8% students think that patients have right to seek second medical opinion.

One of the interesting finding of our study is that 89.3% students, 60.4% interns and 60% residents are ready to treat patients even if patient is unable to pay the expenses. As the students grow their ideology changes and resident doctors become more aware about materialistic world.

In our study percentage of students believing doctors decision final in case of disagreement between patients/relatives and doctors was 57.2, while that of interns was 53.5 and residents was 33.3. When we assessed knowledge on medical practice related medical ethics, we asked about confidentiality ie Information of Patient's condition cannot be diverted to his spouse or parents 71.4% students, 51.8% interns and 26.7% residents agreed, while 28.5%, 28.1% and 26.3% disagreed respectively. Moreover % of not knowing the answer in students was 0%, in interns 20% and in residents it was 47%. This a contradictory finding as the students and interns are more clear in their answers as compared to residents.

21.4% students, 43.7% and 46.7% feel that a doctor may print his photograph along with his qualification and specialty. While study by Angadi et al showed that 31.6% students felt so.²

In our study 12.7% students, 36.2% interns and 53.3% residents it is legal for a Physician to run an open shop for dispensing drugs and appliances prescribed by other doctors. However study by Angadi et al showed 28.7% students were of same opinion.²

Around 39.2% students, 15.8% interns and 20% residents feel that it's better to use brand name than generic name of drug. Whereas in the study done by Chatterji et al ⁵ 59.9% of the students said it is better to prescribe generic drug than brand name in accordance with the principle of ethical conduct.

75% students, 96% interns and 60% residents feel that, it is always necessary for a physician to keep a copy of the certificate issued by them. A doctor should maintain the records of his/her inpatients for 3 years Yes 60% 35.7 % students, 72.8 % interns and 60% residents feel that clinically confirmed cases should also undergo laboratory investigation as a routine. In a study by Adhikari et al 80% doctors believe that doctors are receiving income from referring patients for medical tests.⁸

In our study, majority of students (92.8%) and all interns and residents (100%) believe that Consent has to be taken always for examination, investigation, treatment and procedure. This is a very promising findings showing awareness of interns and residents. They very well know the importance of informed consent.

But in case of children 92.8% students, 96% interns and 93.3% residents believe that they should never be treated without consent of parent.

In our study If law allows abortion, doctors cannot refuse to do abortion is found correct by 10.7% students, 68.2% interns and 60% residents. While study by Adhikari et al showed that 45.7% residents believe so.8

In our study, 17.8% students, 64.1% interns and 80% residents think that doctors are influenced by drug companies, inducements including gifts.

In our study, 25.4% students, 23.6% interns and 20% residents favour cut practice. According to Kale PA, the medical profession itself has nurtured it. Concentration of doctors in urban areas and battle for survival has favoured cut-practice.6 In our study, 92.8% students, 91.8% interns and 100% residents feel that there should be a female attendant when male doctor examines female patient.

Many universities have already started working on the development of an ethics curriculum. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is also planning to introduce a certificate and master's course in medical ethics (9). Our study has shown that there is definitely improvement in knowledge of ethics from students to interns to residents. Practical approach towards patient also changes as a student becomes a resident doctor.

Conclusion: Medical ethics is one of the much neglected topics in healthcare. This study demonstrated that significant proportion of students; interns and resident doctors were unaware of ethical principles. Medical students must be encouraged to practice ethical medical practice right from first year and the knowledge must be reinforced time to time till he is practising. Steps should be taken to highlight the importance of the basic principles of ethics: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality. Furthermore, awareness building should be conducted in the form of seminars, workshops, courses and conferences for doctors to improve and refresh their knowledge of ethical principles.

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