

## Misuse of Red Cross Emblem among Health Care Professionals

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Knowingly or unknowingly the Red Cross emblem is being misused among health care professionals. In the present study, attempt has been made to find out misuse of the emblem amongst health care professionals like by Pharmaceutical shops, Doctor's clinics/ Hospitals, Medical laboratories, Doctor's vehicles and Ambulances. **Material & Methods:** A cross sectional descriptive study (single blind) was conducted on randomly selected pharmaceutical shops, doctor's clinics/hospitals, medical laboratories, doctor's vehicles and ambulances in and around Puducherry from Jan-Feb 2011. All the data were collected randomly by using a self designed questionnaire on use of Red Cross emblem by above mentioned health care professionals. On each category 100 samples were selected. **Results:** Out of 100 samples in each category, it has been found that misuse of Red Cross emblem in Pharmaceutical shops was 12%, Doctor's clinics/Hospitals was 37%, Medical laboratories was 48%, Doctor's vehicle was 21% and in Ambulances it was 66%. **Conclusion:** In spite of existing law against the misuse of Red Cross emblem, its inadvertent use is rampant. It still needs awareness programme among health care professionals from time to time. It is recommended that implementation of existing law should be strictly followed.

**Key words:** Red Cross emblem, Pharmaceutical shops, Hospitals, Medical laboratories, Ambulances.

### INTRODUCTION

Red Cross is an International humanitarian organization which gives the service to the people in war and peace by keeping the spirit of compassion & universal brotherhood which was

proposed by Henry Dunant<sup>1</sup>. He urged that various voluntary National societies would render aid to the wounded one during war without comparing the nationality. He also proposed that these societies must have a protective emblem and trained workers to serve the wounded people and protected by the International treaty. In the Geneva Convention 1864 International Red Cross movement was initiated to aid for the wounded soldiers. The league of Red Cross Society was created in 1919 at Geneva as head quarter to coordinate the work of national societies<sup>2</sup>.

As per the act at Geneva Convention 1960, Red Cross emblem can only be used by the Red Cross Society and the armed forces medical services. Misuse of the emblem is prohibited under Chapter 4 Geneva Convention Act<sup>3</sup>. In India, if any one misuse the red cross emblem shall be put in fine of rupees 500/- and forfeiture of the vehicles or goods will be done with out authorization<sup>3,4</sup>.

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Unauthorized use of the Red Cross emblem is a punishable offence, even Medical practitioners and allied health workers can not use the emblems<sup>2-5</sup>. In India the rampant misuse of Red Cross emblem is being seen by medical practitioners, Government and private hospitals, and also by the chemists<sup>6</sup>. One study from RIMS, Imphal shows that 34% of doctors use Red Cross emblem in their vehicles<sup>7</sup>. This article attempts to review the misuse of Red Cross emblem in various places by the health care professionals in and around Puducherry.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### General settings

The Red Cross emblem gives more identity and status to health care professionals in society. Many health care professionals use this Red Cross emblem very frequently in different places. Any kind of imitation and usurpation of Red Cross emblem is counted as misuse.

### Research design

The study was a cross-sectional descriptive study.

### Study area

This cross sectional study was conducted in and around Puducherry. We considered all directions (East, West, North and South) of Puducherry to collect the data.

### Data collection

All the data collected randomly in a pre designed questionnaire on Red Cross emblem used in Pharmaceutical shops, Doctor's clinics, Medical Laboratories, doctors vehicles & Ambulances. In each category 100 samples were randomly selected for this study between Jan and Feb 2011. Single blind method was adopted for the collection of data. Data was collected from all streets of Puducherry in all directions from the pharmaceutical shops, medical laboratories,

doctors clinics (includes all forms of medical practice), and known doctors vehicles. Data on ambulance was collected from both government and private sectors. Ambulances coming with patients from surrounding areas to different hospitals in Puducherry were also included in this study. Ambulances like '108 services' and discarded ambulances dumped in the campus of Hospital were excluded from the study.

## RESULTS

The Red Cross is the official symbol of Red Cross Society and does not signify any medical facility. Out of 100 pharmaceutical shops studied for misuse of Red Cross emblem, 12 of them used the symbol and 74 used green cross. The common symbol to denote health and medical services is the caduceus, a figure that comprises a short staff rod with two serpents curled around it, sometimes surmounted by wings, which was found only in one doctor's clinic out of 100 random clinics seen. Thirty seven used Red Cross emblem on their signboard. Forty eight out of 100 medical laboratories misused Red Cross emblem on their signboard. Twenty one doctors misused symbol on their own vehicle which include both four and two wheelers. Two-third of the ambulance shows Red Cross emblem on the vehicle.

## DISCUSSION

The emblem of Red Cross society is the most misused symbol in the world<sup>7</sup>. The symbol can only be used by members of the Red Cross Society or the armed forces medical service for identification and protection of personnel during any International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operation at any place. Doctor and people of other medical fraternity cannot use this symbol. The Indian Parliament had passed an ordinance in 1960 against misuse of Red Cross as per the Geneva Convention. Doctor's are supposed to use "Caduceus" and Pharmacist can use 'green cross'. For Hospitals the symbol is a bold white "H" with

blue background and ambulance should use a specific symbol i.e. a blue colored serpentine<sup>2</sup>.

In the present study 12% of pharmaceutical shops used Red Cross symbols on the signboard. Percentage of misuse is small but significant. Till date no study has been conducted to show percentage of misuse of Red Cross by pharmaceutical shops. More than seventy percent used the symbol which is assigned/meant for them i.e. green cross. Out of 100 doctor's clinic or nursing homes or non-allopathic clinic, 37 misused Red Cross symbol. Study by Menon A and Kuruvilla shows 53% doctor used Red Cross symbols in their clinic<sup>6</sup>. This may be due to close alliance of Red Cross society with medical profession<sup>8</sup>. Sometimes it may be due to the mistaken belief on the part of medical professionals, that they are entitled to use Red Cross emblem. Twenty seven percent used other symbols like picture of teeth in dental clinic or heart picture in case of cardiologist etc. Only one clinic used caduceus symbol in its signboard. Nearly half of the medical laboratories misused Red Cross symbol. This may be due to non-allotment of any symbols and popularity and close proximity of Red Cross emblem to any medical service. A specific symbol can be assigned to medical laboratory service, so that its misuse can be reduced. In the present study more than 20% of doctors used Red Cross symbol on their front or rear glass or on the number plates. Similar findings were observed in the study at Imphal, India. Misuse of the symbol in our study is less as compared to the findings of Menon A and Kuruvilaa A<sup>6</sup>. It was also found that 66% ambulances used Red Cross emblem. Ambulances are supposed to use specific logo earmarked for them. This may be due to thinking of ambulance service providers that they are associated with humanitarian services or were not aware of the fact that they were not supposed to use Red Cross symbols<sup>9</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

According to International humanitarian law the emblem is a symbol of protection. With this

view of misuse of the Red Cross emblem among health care professionals, it still needs awareness campaign and training programme for the doctors, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, and ambulance service providers regarding proper use and not to misuse the Red Cross emblem. It is also important to aware regarding proper use of Red Cross emblem among the budding health care professionals. With the involvement of press media and the Director of Health Services towards proper use of Red Cross emblem, few health care professionals do not misuse the Red Cross emblem in Puducherry. Health care professionals should use independent signs assigned to them and popularize them. To bring out protective value of Red Cross, mobile advertisement regarding importance of symbol can be done. We strongly recommend that the implementation of existing law to avoid the misuse of the patent of Red Cross emblem among health care professionals.

**Table No. 1 Symbols used in Pharmaceutical shop**

Symbols	Number of Pharmaceutical shop (n =100)
Red Cross	12
Green Cross	74
Blue Cross	04
White Cross	03
No Symbol	07

**Table No. 2 Symbols used in Doctor's Clinic**

Symbols	Number of Clinics (n =100)
Red Cross	37
Green Cross	06
Caduceus	01
White Cross	02
Other Symbol	27
No Symbol	27

**Table No. 3 Symbols used in Medical Laboratory**

Symbols	Number of Lab. (n =100)
Red Cross	48
White cross	3
Green cross	5
Other symbol	9
No Symbol	35

**Table No. 4 Symbols used in Doctors vehicle**

Symbols	Number of vehicle (n =100)
Red Cross	21
Caduceus	26
'Dr' Symbol	13
No Symbol	40

**Table No. 5 Symbols used in Ambulance**

Symbols	Number of vehicle (n =100)
Red Cross	66
Caduceus(Ambulance symbol)	18
Others	08
No Symbol	8

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