

Present Status of Postmortem Services Available at Private Medical Institutions in India

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Abstract

There are total 381 medical colleges in India out of which 176 are managed by Government and 205 are managed by private management. Out of these only 138 colleges have post graduation in forensic medicine and among these medical colleges maximum about 63% are managed by government and only 37% by unaided private medical colleges. Only one fourth are having post graduation in forensic medicine. Maximum (75%) of private medical colleges in India are either having no facilities and infrastructure for mortuaries and autopsy or not interested to start such services or not allowed by government. Therefore the maximum students of private medical colleges are not receiving proper training in the area of medicolegal works. There are 28 states and 7 territories in India. Only 13 states and one territory (Pondicherry) where private medical colleges are allowed to run post graduate course in forensic medicine and conduct autopsy. Amongst these states about 40% of private medical colleges those running post graduate course in forensic medicine and conducting autopsy are in only in Karnataka followed by Andhra Pradesh (11.76%), UP (11.76%), Maharashtra (7.8%). Therefore, it is very essential to Government should make mandatory to all private and government colleges/institutions to have the facilities for autopsy.

Keywords: Autopsy centre; Medico-legal work facilities; Private medical college.

Introduction

Today, Medical science has a very strong role in disbursement of justice through legal system. However, use of medical knowledge is not new to present age, this law-medicine relationship date back to history, in many parts of the world.

In India, Forensic Medicine has attained

current status after passing through various phases. But unfortunately, medico legal investigation system in our country still lags behind developed countries. The broad goal of undergraduate students undergoing teaching in forensic medicine is to produce doctors who are well informed and make observations to draw conclusions, by logical deductions to set enquiries on the right track in criminal matters/medico-legal cases. This requires knowledge of the law in relation to medical practice and medical negligence and respect for medical ethics.[1]

According to recent updates available in MCI websites that there are total 381 medical colleges in India out of which 176 are managed by Government and 205 are managed by private management. Out of these 381, only 138 colleges have post graduation in forensic medicine and among these medical colleges maximum about 63% are managed by government and only 37% are unaided private medical colleges. Although the total number of medical colleges those run by private body are more about 54% of total but only one

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fourth are having post graduation in forensic medicine [2]. The unaided medical colleges having post graduation in forensic medicine are just 24.87 percent of the total medical colleges managed by private in India.

Forensic Medicine in India

Its Current Status

Forensic medicine has been introduced in the studies of medical graduate students to make them aware of legal and criminal aspects of medicine. A medical graduate needs to know the basic aspects of law in relation to medical practice and the medical side of criminal matters. However as per a study conducted at Bangalore and research institute, the curriculum does not fulfill the very aim of introducing the subject of forensic medicine in the undergraduates.[1]

As it is in India, unlike in developed countries, the major medico-legal work is done by government medical officers few amongst whom are having post-graduate qualification in forensic medicine. Hence it is necessary to train undergraduates in a more integrated manner so that they can execute quality medico-legal work that would be invaluable in the dispensation of justice. Most of the post mortems are done by in Primary health centers, rural hospital and civil hospitals, which are done by government doctors who do not have special degree in forensic medicine. Very few post mortems are done and expert opinions are given by forensic department of medical colleges. The postmortems are done by general duty medical officers who are only having medical graduations with some training in Forensic Medicine.

In rural areas medicolegal autopsies are not done regularly reasons might be variable as due to lack of interest on part of the investigating agency and lack of knowledge or awareness in villagers especially in cases of poisoning. There could even be a cultural taboo or apathy to investigate crimes.

In our country, as it is the infrastructure in health facility is already inadequate. Especially mortuaries are given least importance.

Naturally many mortuaries do not have basic facilities. For example, there is lack of electricity supply in rural areas. Hence basic needs like cold storage, facilities cannot be maintained properly. Hence the problem of dead bodies getting decomposed and eventual loss of important medical evidence always looms large. Mortuaries in rural hospitals are not maintained properly and are unclean. The building allotted for autopsies is many a time dilapidated with broken windows and doors which make mortuary a public place. Confidentiality and secrecy can hardly be expected. Proper instruments are not available. Sterility of containers to collect viscera for higher investigation stands the chances of contamination.

The total forensic medicine seats available in India are approximately 325.[2] Out of these about 131 seats for postgraduate courses in forensic medicine is available in private medical colleges/institutions. There are majority of medical graduates do not opt for post graduation in field of forensic medicine and even opt and join the course with a hope that they will get some other clinical or paraclinical subject in forthcoming counseling or entrance. It could be because of the stigma attached to the doctor conducting autopsy that he/she may neither consider as a doctor nor a surgeon. In addition the working condition in the mortuaries is poor and unhygienic. Resulting that the department is under staffed and naturally staffs are over burdened. Autopsies conducted in hospitals which are not medical colleges are usually conducted by doctors who are MBBS or Post graduate of another faculty. They do not have special expertise in forensic medicine. Hence the chances of collecting medical evidence and presenting properly before the court are poor. Since the department of forensic medicine is usually under staffed, there is every chance that mistakes in collecting evidence become inevitable due to over work.

Medical evidence alone stands above all other evidence in a court of law. There are many instances where, even if all witnesses turn hostile, courts have convicted the accused if the medical evidence is conclusive.

Newer techniques like narco-analysis, brain mapping and polygraphy are being utilized by some forensic science laboratories in the investigation of various crimes. However the participation of doctors in such investigations raises many ethical questions.[3]

Postmortem in Private Colleges

Most of the private medical colleges in India are not allowed or eligible for conducting autopsies. Only 25 % of private medical colleges are allowed/eligible to have facilities for postmortem. Maximum (75%) of private medical colleges are either having no facilities and infrastructure for mortuaries or collection of evidence in medico-legal cases or not allowed by government. Therefore the maximum students of private medical colleges are not receiving proper training in the area of medico-legal works.

There are 28 states and 7 territories in India. Only 13 states (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal) and one territory (Pondicherry) where private medical colleges are allowed to run post graduate course in forensic medicine and conduct autopsy. Amongst these states about 40 % of private medical colleges those running post graduate course in forensic medicine and conducting autopsy are in Karnataka only followed by Andhra Pradesh (11.76%), UP (11.76%), Maharashtra (7.8%).[2] There are 60 % of states including territories in country where either government not allowed to private medical colleges to conduct autopsy and run post graduate course in forensic medicine or private medical colleges are not interested for the same.

Post Mortem Risk Allowance

The post mortem job is a risky, tiresome and often unwanted. In some states like Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka the doctors performing post-mortem duties are paid extra allowance as an incentive. Whereas, in Punjab the government pays such an allowance only to

Para-medical staffs. The state government has also passed a directive to have allowances of Rs. 130 per body to autopsy teams in Maharashtra in 2008.[4]

Current Issue

In twenty one out of thirty five districts of Maharashtra there are no forensic experts.[5] These districts do not have medical colleges or department of forensic medicine and toxicology. Naturally there are no post graduate trainees; these districts do not have any post for forensic consultants. Thus the peripheral post mortem centers are poorly equipped for conducting autopsies.

There are some places in India like Mumbai where a post called "police surgeon" exists. The principle behind this post is that a single person who handles both forensic (collecting evidences, preserving them etc) and therapeutic (treatment, care) levels. It is highly difficult on part of a single person to handle both departments simultaneously that to maintaining good efficiency.

The Positive aspect of current status is that some states such as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh etc. where a private doctors qualified in forensic medicine from private medical colleges also allowed to conduct medico-legal post-mortems. This has eased the workload of government doctors and also made things easier for the general public.[6]

Remedies

- 1] The government should allow and if possible make mandatory to the private medical institutions for conduction of medico-legal procedures including autopsies.
- 2] Such unaided medical colleges should be allowed to run post graduation in forensic medicine and toxicology.
- 3] The infrastructure of mortuaries in Medical colleges as well as rural hospitals in peripheral areas should be improved.
- 4] Proper curriculum updates and teaching

facilities should be made available.

- 5] Post of experts in peripheral centers should be created and filled.
- 6] Such centers should be well equipped with uninterrupted electric supply to maintain cold storage and other tools to conduct autopsy properly.
- 7] The police or the legal system and forensic experts are the two arms on which rests the head of medical legal faculty. Hence there should be impartial and clear coordination between the law and medicine.

Thus there is immediate need to look in to matter and take some action in desired direction to bring positive change in current grave situation.

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