

Assessment of Medico-Legal Knowledge among Interns and Residents at Vikhe Patil Institute of Medical Sciences

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Abstract

Forensic Medicine and Toxicology is an indispensable part of medical education. It deals not only with medico-legal autopsy, but also enlightens medical ethics in medical students. Medical Council of India has reduced the strength of qualified teaching staff required for under-graduate teaching which has deteriorated the quality and importance of subject in giving justice to medical education as well as criminal justice. The arising public cognizance about medical field, conduct of medical professionals and changing doctor-patient relationship has affected medical practice.

The present study is aimed to assess the knowledge and attitude of medical interns and post-graduate students of Padmashree Dr Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Foundation's Medical College, Ahmednagar towards ethical and legal aspects of medical practice. This is cross sectional, questionnaire based study conducted at Padmashree Dr Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Foundation's Medical College, Ahmednagar from 1st January 2016 to 30th June 2016. Total 101 students volunteered for this study. It was found that most of the students failed to answer questions about negligence, autopsy, viscera preservation and duration of keeping medico-legal records. Hence, one month internship should be mandatory in Forensic Medicine and Toxicology and Forensic Medicine teaching staff should be restored to boost up knowledge of students about their ethical and medico-legal responsibilities during practice of medicine.

Keywords: Consent; Medico-Legal Knowledge; Medical Negligence; Record Keeping.

Introduction

Forensic medicine and toxicology is an important subject in medical science. Jurisprudence deals with legal aspects of practice of medicine which are often neglected by registered medical practitioners who then have to face charges of medical negligence. In medical practice, professionalism connotes not only knowledge and skill but also character, especially compassion and ethics [1]. Commercialization of modern medical practice and growing public awareness about the conduct of medical practitioners has affected the practice of medicine and escalated

cases of medical litigation by unsatisfied patients [2].

The training period is critical time for interns and post-graduates. During this period transition from student to physician takes place with better understanding to learn medico-legal work [3-4]. For proper training of medico-legal examination, the casualty must be attached to and supervised by the Forensic Medicine department and posting of interns and postgraduates in Forensic Medicine should be made compulsory [5]. It should be realized by all doctors that they have to deal with medico-legal cases throughout their carrier irrespective of the faculty they choose. So having knowledge about the subject is very important while working in hospital or in private clinic. Also the medical ethics and various acts related to medical practice should be emphasized in the undergraduate and postgraduate levels [6].

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To avoid litigations, medical practitioners need to familiarize themselves with the regulation and laws that concern their practice as ignorance of law is no

excuse for violating it. Keeping this in mind, the present study was carried out to assess the knowledge of interns and residents regarding medico-legal problems and to make them aware about law and liabilities related to medical practice.

Material and Methods

A questionnaire based cross-sectional study was conducted in Padmashri Dr Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Foundations Medical College, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, India during period of 6 months

(January 2016 to June 2016) after Institutional Ethics Committee's approval. The study was carried out in total 101 students (70 interns and 31 residents). They were explained the purpose of study after which they voluntarily participated. They were informed about the confidentiality of the information collected so as to get more reliable answers from them. A self-administered questionnaire containing 20 items relating to knowledge and attitudes of medical ethics and Forensic Medicine was designed and pre-tested. The collected data was tabulated and analyzed statistically with Microsoft excel.

Observations

No.	Questions	Rightly answered by interns	Rightly answered by residents
1	How long do you have to keep IPD records of medico-legal case?	36(51.4%)	5(16%)
2	What is the minimum age to give consent for major operation?	54(77.1%)	19(61.3%)
3	Not attending a patient during emergency is a punishable act?	66(94.2%)	27(87%)
4	Refusing to treat a HIV positive patient is an offence?	40(51.1%)	25(80.6%)
5	If a nurse misplaced a gauge piece in the surgical site which was then sutured, who will be held responsible?	16(22.8%)	10(32.2%)
6	According to Section 174 crpc, who is the authority to decide medico legal autopsy?	11(15.7%)	9(29%)
7	Does consent of patient's relative required for Clinical autopsy?	48(68.5%)	25(80.6%)
8	Which preservative is used for chemical analysis of routine viscera?	21(30%)	7(22.5%)
9	For MTP whose consent is required?	35(50%)	20(64.5%)
10	Does fall in bathroom constitutes MLC?	31(44.2%)	23(74.2%)
11	Who should issue death certificate?	11(15.7%)	4(12.9%)
12	Which type of injury is dislocation of tooth?	45(64.2%)	19(61.2%)
13	According to 375 IPC only touching of penis or any object to any part of female body constitutes rape?	51(72.8%)	29(93.5%)
14	"RED CROSS" (+) emblem is the right of the doctors.	37(52.8%)	23(74.2%)
15	Are you aware of WHO format of Death Certificate and ICD codes?	56(80%)	23(74.2%)
16	Do you think consent and proper documentation can be a strong defense against charge of negligence?	62(88.5%)	21(67.7%)
17	Is postmortem examination is needed in all cases of sudden, unnatural death?	56(80%)	26(83.8%)
18	What is the purpose of doing Postmortem examination?	60(85.7%)	29(93.5%)
19	Whether postmortem examination causes disfigurement and disrespect to humanbody?	44(62.8%)	20(64.5%)
20	Interested in specializing in Forensic Medicine. If not, reasons for Not Specializing.	Y- 4(5.7%)	Y- 0
	A) Not interested in Forensic Medicine	A- 07(10%)	A-08(25.8%)
	B) Interested in other specialties	B- 12(17.1%)	B- 02(6.4%)
	C) Not lucrative, Scope in India is minimal	C- 32(45.7%)	C- 18(58%)
	D) No reasons	D- 15(21.4%)	D- 3(9.6%)

Discussion

In our study, survey of 101 (70 interns and 31 residents) students was done at PDVVPF's Medical College, Ahmednagar. All voluntarily participated students answered 20 questionnaires as mentioned in above table.

In this present study, regarding knowledge of medico-legal documents and record keeping, very few were aware about duration of record keeping in medico-legal cases, format of death certificate and its issuing authority. However, majority of

participants were aware of International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and believed that proper documentation can help in defending charge of negligence. Our study does not coincide with the study by Makhani et al [7] and Jasuma J Rai et al [8]. Under Article 51A(h) of the Constitution of India, there is moral obligation on the doctor, and a legal duty, to maintain and preserve medical, medico-legal and legal documents in the interest of social and professional justice [9]. The issue of medical record keeping has been addressed in the Medical Council of India Regulations 2002 guidelines answering

many questions regarding medical records which states that doctor should maintain indoor records in a standard pro forma for 3 years from commencement of treatment [10].

Majority of participants were aware of various aspects of informed consent like, age of consent in respect to major operation and medical termination of pregnancy. Our findings coincide with the study by Heywood R. et al [11]. Thorough knowledge about the informed, expressed consent is a sound defense against medico-legal cases. Considering the knowledge about doctor's duty in emergency and towards HIV positive patient, most of the students are mindful about it. Many of the students were cognizant about the criteria for labeling medico-legal case and grievous hurt. They also acknowledged the recent amendments in S. 375 of Indian penal Code in relation to rape.

Autopsy helps in establishing the cause and manner of death in both clinical and forensic cases. Autopsies also help clinicians to confirm diagnosis, as well as the identification of new and re-emerging diseases, and thus they are important in both protecting the public health and improving the accuracy of vital statistics [12]. In present study, majority of students failed to answer about the deciding authority for conducting medico-legal autopsy. They were also not aware about preservative used for viscera to be sent for chemical analysis. Many participants answered correctly about aims and objectives of medico-legal autopsy, but 41.8% of them believed that autopsy causes dis-figuration and disrespect to the deceased which is not the fact.

Majority of students failed to answer questions related to medical negligence and allied aspects. This indicates limited understanding of students about negligence and law and more efforts should be made to sensitize them about law and liabilities related to their practice.

The majority of interns was not interested in specializing in Forensic Medicine (94.3%) because they believe that Forensic medicine, as a career option, is not lucrative and has very limited scope in India. The reason put forward was limited job opportunities due to staff reduction done in teaching faculty in this subject. The findings of our study are in congruence with study by Nihal Ahmed et al [13] and Ekanem and Akhibe [14].

Conclusion

The present study is a sincere attempt to assess the knowledge of medical interns and residents about

informed consent, record keeping, medico-legal cases, negligence and medico-legal autopsy. The participants were aware about record keeping, informed consent and aims and objectives of medico-legal autopsy, but lacking in details about medico-legal negligence, viscera preservation in autopsy and death certificate. The Clinical Forensic Medicine branch is gaining importance day by day considering negligence cases and other litigations arising during practice. Hence, curriculum regarding horizontal and vertical integration of this branch shall be done in curriculum and sufficient Forensic Medicine staff shall be recruited to handle and teach medico-legal cases at casualty.

Conflict of Interest

Nil

Ethical Clearance

Taken from Institutional Ethical Committee.

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Not applicable

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