

## Awareness of Medical Ethics among the Practitioners in a Teaching Medical College, Hospital-A Survey

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### Abstract

There is growing public awareness regarding the ethical conduct of medical practitioners and complaints against physicians appear to be increasing. Changing doctor-patient relationship and commercialization of modern medical practice has affected medical practice.

*Objective:* To assess the knowledge and attitudes towards medical ethics among doctors in a Teaching Medical College, Hospital.

*Study design:* Observational descriptive study.

*Material and methods:* A self-administered structured questionnaire was distributed to all doctors in a Teaching Medical College, Hospital, a total 110 practitioners of various clinical departments participated.

*Result:* 90% of the total participants were well aware about medico legal cases. All the participants doing ethical practice out of them 12% practice as per the demand of the situation. Dichotomy should not be a part of medical practice expressed by 88% of participants. Awareness regarding MCI code of medical ethics 2002 shown by 52% of respondents and 57% knows the role of ethical committee in their institute. Majority, 88% of them expressed that 15 days duty in the department of Forensic Medicine should be mandatory during internship to handle the medicolegal cases properly.

**Key Words:** Medical Ethics; Medico Legal Cases; Medical negligence.

### Introduction:

Multiple factors increasing use of technology, paradigm shifts in patients attitudes to doctors

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and vice versa, consumerism, litigation, and so on have resulted in making the law an integral aspect of healthcare today<sup>[1]</sup>. Some of these new issues addressed nowadays are Legal and ethical aspects of healthcare. In medicine, professionalism is about not only knowledge and skills, but also character, especially compassion and ethics.<sup>2</sup>

Due to growing public awareness regarding the ethical conduct of medical practitioners and complaints against physicians appear to be increasing. Changing doctor-patient relationship and commercialization of modern medical practice has affected medical practice. Negligence is suspected as a cause of patients suffering. There is an increasing trend of medical litigation by discontented patients. The recent rise in litigation against doctors has become an issue of immediate concern.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for these are social, economic, professional and judicial. Increasing media awareness about medical facts and fallacies, professional accountability and rights of patients in terms of information, decision-making and assessing outcomes are important social factors. Negative publicity about doctor's profession in the media has done further damage. Moreover, doctor-patient confrontations have been increasing in the recently. Doctors should become familiar with the regulations and laws that are concerned to their practice. Doctors have several ethical, moral and legal obligations in their duties. Every doctor should understand the nature of these obligations and then fulfill these obligations to the best of their ability which has become important in these days.<sup>4</sup>

### Why this study

Ignorance of law is no excuse for violating it. It is duty of everyone to know the law which concerns him or her. Nowadays practicing medicine is hazardous and risky. Mutual faith replaced with

mutual suspicion. This study was taken up to assess the knowledge and practice of medical ethics and professionalism among doctors working in our hospital.

### Materials and Methods:

A study was conducted in our institute in the month of January and February 2020.

- Inclusion criteria: All the doctors of the clinical departments were approached and total 110 are included in the study.
- Exclusion criteria: Those who were on leave, refused to participate and those who were not available on the third visit were excluded from the study.

A structured, self-administered questionnaire containing 19 items relating to awareness and attitudes to medical ethics was devised and pre-tested. An analysis was carried out for the questions by categorizing them into either the "yes" or the "no" and "can't say /don't know answers. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the institute authority. Oral informed consent was taken from each respondent. Confidentiality was maintained.

### Result

According to this survey total 110 numbers of practicing clinical members of various clinical departments of our hospital are included. Questionnaire related to awareness regarding the medico legal cases, 90% of the participants were awarded about the medico legal cases and 82% of the total study group are taking precautions while handling medico legal cases (Table No.-1). Responding to the questions about the medical ethics (Table No. 2) 100% of the participants preferred an ethical practice but 12% of them are practicing as per the situation.68% of the respondents strongly disagree with the dichotomy in medical practice,52% of the participants have knowledge about the MCI code of ethics 2002 , 57% are aware of the role of ethical committee in their institute, 54% of the participants have suggested modification in the code of medical ethics should be with t changing scenario of law in relation to medical practice.

When answering the questions related to medical negligence and related affairs (Table No.-3) 82% of the participants are aware to the

facts that what makes a practitioner negligent in view of the patients and in case of taking proper precautions to prevent the litigations, 85% were doing that. Proper consent and documentation can prevent a charge of negligence as believed by 84% of participants 20% of them neither taking nor reluctant to take proper consent before any examination or procedure.

About the rights of being a registered medical practitioner (Table No. 4) Using "RED CROSS" emblem is the right of a doctor expressed by 43% of total study group and 69% agreed that inclusion of medical practice under consumer protection act has made medicine practice defensible. In spite of an increasing trend of litigations and compensation suites against the practitioners, only 35% of the total participants have insurance and 16% showed ignorance about the self-insurance in practice.

Responding to other various aspects of medical practice (TableNo. 5) 68% of the participants were not aware about the international format of Death Certification,85% of them showed opposition against euthanasia practice in medical field.15 days duty in the Department of Forensic Medicine should be made mandatory during internship to handle the medicolegal cases as expressed by 88% of respondents. Everyone have showed their eagerness to attend the CME related to medicolegal cases and medical ethics.

**Table 1:** Data related to awareness regarding medicolegal cases.

Question	Yes	No	To some extent
Awareness about medico legal cases	99(90%)		11(10%)
Taking precautions during handling medico legal cases	90(82%)	20(18%)	

**Table 2:** Data related to medical ethics.

Question	Yes	No	Can't say
Are you in favor of an ethical practice	110(100%)		
Are you practicing as per the ethics	97(88%)		13(12%)
Usefulness of dichotomy in medical practice	18(16%)	75(68%)	18(16%)
Are you aware of MCI's Code of Ethics,2002	63(57%)	35(32%)	18(16%)
Do you know the role of ethical committee in your institution	63(57%)	30(27%)	18(16%)
Are you in favor of a modification in medical ethics	60(54%)	33(30%)	28(16%)

**Table No.3** Data related to medical negligence and affairs.

Questions	Yes	No	Don't know / Depending on the circumstance.
Do you know what makes a practitioner negligent?	90(82%)	20(18%)	
Are you taking precautions to prevent charge of negligence?	93(85%)	08(07%)	9(08%)
Are you taking proper consent before any examination or procedure?	88(80%)	9(08%)	13(12%)
Do you think consent and documentation can prevent a charge of negligence?	92(84%)	9(08%)	9(08%)

**Table No 4** Data related to rights of register medial practitioner.

Question	Yes	No	Don't know
Have you insured yourself	38(35%)	60(49%)	18(16%)
"RED CROSS" emblem is the right of the doctors	48(43%)	52(47%)	11(10%)
Inclusion of medical practice in CPA made the practice defensive	76(69%)	18(16%)	16(15%)

**Table No.5** Data related to various medical practices.

Question	Yes	No	Don't know
Are you aware of International format of Death Certificate	35(32%)	75(68%)	
Do you favor Euthanasia	11(10%)	93(85%)	7(05%)
Do you feel 15 days forensic medicine duty during internship to be made mandatory to handle the MLC properly	97(88%)	13(12%)	
CME in relation to MLC and medical ethics in regular interval	110(100%)		

## Discussion:

During the survey of 110 faculty members from clinical departments of our hospital it was observed that 10% of them were not able to identify the medico legal cases they come across and 18% of them were disinterested to take any protection while dealing with Medicolegal cases. Although

everyone in the survey are in favor of doing ethical practice 12% deviates at times.

About half of the respondent doctors had "heard" and even "read" the Code of Ethics. This could be because the respondents consulted their colleagues or read the code between the time they received the questionnaire and the time that they returned the completed questionnaire.

However, few of them gave correct responses to questions on specific sections of the Code of Ethics which indicates lack of knowledge about medical ethics. Though nearly 57% knew about an ethics committee in this college and very few knew about the role of this committee.

As it is highlighted 18% are not aware of their activities which can prevent them from negligence and 7% knows very little. As such 15% are not able to take any precaution in preventing charge of negligence. 20% of them had no knowledge that taking a consent and proper documentation is beneficial in preventing litigations.

Even when more than half the respondents are unaware about questions on self-insurance and whether doctors were covered under the Consumer Protection Act their responses could not be considered satisfactory as such things should be known by all doctors.

## Conclusion

There was lack of proper and detailed knowledge on the MCI's Code of Ethics among doctors though a little more than half of them had read it once or partially. There is a need to sensitize them to the Code of Ethics and to medical ethics in general. A test on the code at the time of registration could be considered.<sup>5</sup>

The medical ethics and acts related to medical practice should be considered in the MBBS under graduate and also in post graduate syllabus. Medical career being life-long learning, there is always a continuum between practice and education. Medical ethics teaching and training should help the doctors at any level which will help in adapting the discipline and theorizing the basic principles of ethical reasoning.<sup>6</sup> The application of ethics to medical practice dates back to ancient civilization as even today, all medical graduates must swear symbolic adherence to the Hippocratic Oath. Codes of conduct and laws regulating the profession are laid down from time to time.<sup>7</sup> The annual CME programme on medical ethics should be mandatory for all practitioners.

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