

Medical Ethics: From the eyes of Undergraduate Medical students, a Study Conducted in Vadodara

Sefaliben Patel¹, Reekee Patel², Dushyant kumar Barot³

¹1st Year Resident Doctor, Anatomy Department, Medical College Baroda, Gujarat, ²Associate Professor, Forensic Medicine Department, Parul Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, ³Associate Professor, Forensic Medicine Department, Banas Medical College and Research Institute, Palanpur, Gujarat.

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Abstract

Medical Practitioners are guided and guarded by Medical Ethics as it provides various Do's and Don'ts for Medical Practitioners. Safe clinical practice is the universal motto as nowadays allegations are being increased against doctors. Knowledge of Medical Ethics and proper execution of principle of ethics can safeguard the clinical practice of doctors and can save them from allegations as well as from negligence charges. So a cross sectional observational study is conducted to assess the knowledge regarding medical ethics amongst undergraduate students of a medical college vadodara. A study questionnaire was prepared containing basic questions pertaining to Medical Ethics and that was pretested over 50 medical under graduate students as pilot study and was modified by amendments of different answer options of questions asked for better outcome. The study reveal that students are well aware about medical ethics but still there are areas involving ethical dilemma and virtue ethics require improvement for which students are keen to learn medical ethics more. Students opine that learning of medical ethics can enhance the clinical practice skills, competencies and can lead to better future clinical practice as well for patient care.

Key Words: Clinical Practice, Ethical Dilemma, Knowledge, Medical Ethics, Under Graduate Medical students.

Introduction

Medical Ethics deals with the moral principles which should guide members of the medical profession in their dealings with each other, their patients and the state¹. Ethical behavior is a self imposed duty upon each doctor. The medical profession is governed by legislation and by a code

of Ethics & Etiquette. Medical profession is bound by code of conduct prescribed by Medical Ethics. Medical Ethics provides various duties of doctors in their clinical practice which also includes behavior with the patients. WHO has stated earlier that as far as clinical practice is concern, ethics can be considered as heart or core part of the it².

Corresponding Author: Reekee Patel, Associate Professor, Forensic Medicine Department, Parul Institute of Medical Sciences & Research, Parul University, Limda, Waghodiya, Vadodara, Gujarat.

Email: dr.reekee@gmail.com

Mobile: 9724326289

The code of medical ethics is the rules framed on the basis of the sense of moral values, to guide the conduct of all concerned³. Hippocratic Oath is the oldest code of medical ethics which is being followed till date⁴. Allegations against medical practitioners by patients or relative of the patients are quite common. A thorough and precise knowledge of Medical Ethics and proper implementation of relevant principles of ethics can safeguard the clinical practice of doctors and can save them from unnecessary accusations as well as from negligence charges. Apart from that, medical ethics describes various virtues imposed by medical practitioners which will be required to become skillful competent and efficient medical practitioner. Earlier the emphasis has also been made by government by including teaching of ethics in very first year of MBBS curriculum.

Materials and Methods

This cross sectional observational study was conducted amongst the undergraduate medical students of Parul Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat. Study includes medical students of final part I and part II MBBS as voluntary participation.

A study questionnaire was prepared containing 12 questions pertaining to Medical Ethics and which was pretested over 50 medical under graduate students as pilot study which was modified by amendments of different answer options of questions asked for better outcome. Informed written consent was taken and students were instructed not to reveal their identity. Total 298 students have submitted the questionnaire with their answers related to medical ethics and data was analysed for conclusion.

Results and Discussion

Sr. No	Question	Gender	Response of Students	
			Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Can you define Medical Ethics?	Male	112 (96.55)	4 (3.45)
		Female	177 (97.25)	5 (2.75)
2	Are you aware about "Virtue Ethics"?	Male	4 (3.4)	112 (96.6)
		Female	11 (6)	171 (94)
3	Are you aware about Infamous conduct?	Male	80 (68.97)	36 (31.03)
		Female	161 (88.46)	21 (11.53)
4	Do you know Hippocratic Oath?	Male	114 (98.28)	2 (1.72)
		Female	181 (99.45)	1 (0.55)
5	Are you aware about duties and rights of registered medical practitioner?	Male	104 (89.66)	12 (10.34)
		Female	174 (95.60)	8 (4.40)
6	Do you know Rule of Professional secrecy?	Male	107 (92.24)	9 (7.76)
		Female	176 (96.70)	6 (3.30)
7	Are you aware about negligence?	Male	101 (87.07)	15 (12.93)
		Female	171 (93.96)	11 (6.04)
8	Are you aware about the importance of consent in medical practice?	Male	114 (98.28)	2 (1.72)
		Female	180 (98.90)	2 (1.1)
9	Do think students should be sensitized about possible ethical dilemmas?	Male	116 (100)	0 (0)
		Female	182 (100)	0(0)
10	Do you agree that learning of ethics enhance the skills of medical practitioner and helps in safe clinical practice?	Male	115 (99.14)	1 (0.86)
		Female	182 (100)	0(0)
11	Are you willing to learn more about Medical Ethics?	Male	103 (88.79)	13 (11.21)
		Female	155 (85.16)	27 (14.84)
12	Do you support the thought of keeping a separate subject of "Medical Law and Ethics" in curriculum?	Male	55 (47.4)	61(52.6)
		Female	103(56.6)	79(43.4)

Total 298 students participated in the study. Out of which 182 were females and 116 were males and male to female ratio being 1:1.5. Female dominance in such higher education field has also been observed in other study⁵. 96.55% male participants and 97.25% female participants were aware about ethics. 68.97% male participants and 88.46% female participants were having knowledge of infamous conduct. Majority of students were not aware about virtue ethics. Thorough knowledge of virtues will produce virtuous physician which is the need of an hour. Virtues must be studied in detail in relation to clinical practice. Virtues like honesty, compassion, equality, transparency, kindness, team work and leadership have effect on moral dilemmas and their strict inclusion in curriculum will definitely help development of moral character which we look after in an "Ideal Doctor"⁶. There shall be problem base learning methods for teaching virtues to medical students and it can help them in moral decision making process when they will become physicians⁷.

98.25% male participants and 99.45% female participants were having knowledge about Hippocratic oath. Similar observation has been reported by other authors⁸. 89.66% male participants and 95.60% female participants know the rights and duties of registered medical practitioner. 92.24% male participants and 96.70% female participants stated that they know rule of professional secrecy. 97.07% male participants and 93.96% female participants confirm knowledge about negligence. This is in contrast to other study where only 10% students correctly answered about negligence⁹.

All the participants opined that various ethical dilemmas shall be sensitized to them in advance so they can tackle them when necessity arises. Ethical and moral dilemmas are going to be a part of clinical practice. The possibility of dilemmas can't be ruled out and yes the frequency of the same may be variable which has also been observed by other authors as well^{10,11}. A study also raised the concern of importance of awareness regarding various ethical dilemmas and their effects on career of a medical practitioner¹². 98.28% male participants and 98.90% female participants were aware about the importance of consent in medical practice. Importance of consent has also been observed by other study¹³. Nowadays

allegations against doctors are increased and social media may have also played the role for sensitization of regarding negligence cases.

99.14% male participants and all female participants stated that knowledge of ethics can enhance skills of medical practitioner as well as ethics will help in safe clinical practice. Education in medical ethics help in practicing medicine professionally also observed by other study^{14,15}. 88.79% male participants and 85.16% female participants stated that learning ethics is interesting and they are willing to learn more about ethics which has also been observed in other studies¹⁶. Such positive attitude for necessity of learning ethics and its importance has also been observed in similar studies^{17,18}. When participants were asked about adding up a separate subject of Medical Law and Ethics, mixed opinions were received. They are already coping up with many medical subjects so though they showed interest to learn ethics more but only half of the participants agreed upon a thought of inclusion of a separate subject in curriculum.

Conclusion

The study reveals that students are having fair knowledge about certain basic principles of medical ethics. In this era of digital & print media, students must have observed the amount of allegations against doctors and at the same time the education system is also stressing a lot about learning ethics for which various modules have been introduced. Ethics being taught in second year of MBBS and had been also a part of foundation course earlier. Students are also learning ethics from ATCOM Modules. So these can be the reason for the fair knowledge about medical ethics. There are still certain areas like ethical dilemmas, virtue ethics and areas regarding practical applicability of the principles of ethics require improvement which must be taught by problem base learning. Most of the student showed good interest in learning ethics more and they opine that learning ethics can help improve skills for practice of medicine and can help in safe clinical practice as well. This study more focused about the theoretical knowledge so for that a study with clinical case scenario shall be conducted which stimulate the actual execution of principles of ethics and how these students will be helped by knowledge of medical ethics.

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