

An Analytical Study on Medicolegal Cases at a Tertiary Care Hospital

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Abstract

Introduction: Medico-legal audits are an integral part of hospital/clinical audits and involve examination of the hospital records. The clinical audits aim towards improvement of quality of care and hence are limited to the scrutiny of patient's clinical records. On the other hand, a medico-legal audit aims at the prevention of foreseeable litigations on the hospital and includes the perusal of all the hospital records.

Aim: To perform a Medicolegal records audit at a tertiary care hospital

Results: Road traffic accidents are the major Medicolegal cases(65%) arriving to the emergency department. Males are more involved in the Medicolegal incidents than females.

Conclusion: The medico-legal auditing helps in the necessary changes to be put forth for the better functioning of the hospital

Key words: Audit, Documentation, Medicolegal records

Introduction

A physician has a dual responsibility, the first being a duty of care towards the patient and secondly, a duty to serve the interest of justice¹. These two roles should be executed in a balanced way when came across a medico-legal case. Documentation of medical records is regarded as an essential element in the legal system of country². Auditing includes an examination of records, whether financial or nonfinancial, maintained by the institute and to express an opinion based on these records, whether they are within specific law and regulations applicable to that entity

or institute³. Medico-legal audits are an integral part of hospital/clinical audits and involve examination of the hospital records. Clinical audit is a process that has been defined as a quality improvement process that seeks to improve patient care and outcomes through systematic review of care against explicit criteria and the implementation of change⁴. These clinical audits aim towards improvement of quality of care and hence are limited to the scrutiny of patient's clinical records. On the other hand, a medico-legal audit aims at the prevention of foreseeable litigations on the hospital and includes the perusal of all the hospital records⁵. The importance of these medico-legal audits arises

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mainly in cases where the hospital has to deal with the legal system of that land. In order to prevent the litigations arising, every hospital shall incorporate and make the medico-legal audits mandatory.

Aim

To study the available records and conduct an audit at a tertiary care hospital.

Methodology

This is a document based retrospective study which was conducted in a tertiary care hospital during the period January 2022 to December 2022. A total number of 653 medicolegal cases documented during this period were studied. All the Medicolegal cases that arrived to the emergency room of the hospital were properly recorded in the Medicolegal register. These records were studied and analysed by using a master chart after obtaining permission from the Institutional Ethics Committee and head of Emergency Medicine Dept.

Results

Age and Sex

The age and sex of the individual is recorded accurately for all the cases. In this study, most no. of cases (496) were in the age group of 21-40 years when compared to other age groups and males outnumbered the females(males=477, females=176) (Table -1) of the total cases. This clearly depicts that the middle age group males were the victims in these Medicolegal cases.

Type of Medicolegal case

The type of case whether it is RTA, poisoning, burns, hanging, drowning, fall from height, brought dead cases etc were 100%recorded in the MLC register. As per the study, the majority of the Medicolegal cases arrived to the emergency department were road traffic accidents (422) followed by poisoning cases (97) (Fig-1) (Table-1). This shows that accidents are the most common MLCs which can be reduced by stringent laws, proper laying of roads and proper usage of helmets etc.

Time of incidence

The incidence time for few cases was not mentioned in some records. As per the available

data, the study shows that more no. of incidents (340) occurred from 6AM – 6PM (daytime) when compared to cases (290) during 6PM – 6AM (nighttime). This shows that many cases can be prevented from occurring as most of them were during daytime.

Admission in hospital

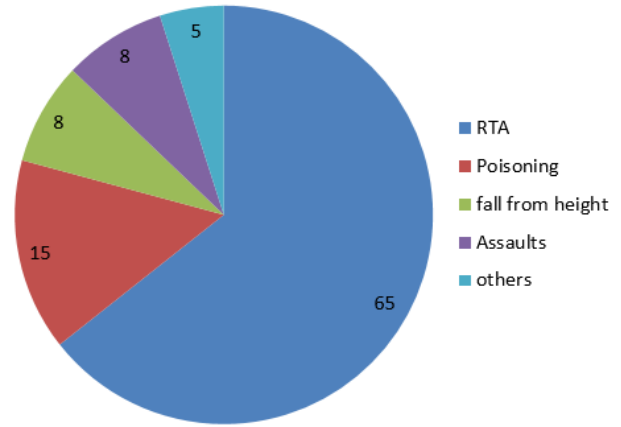
The details regarding admission are missing in 1% of the records. As per the data, almost equal no. of cases were admitted in the hospital (268) and got treated in the out-patient basis (286). Some cases were LAMA (62) and very few brought dead cases (3).

Clinical details

In most no. of documents, the recording of the pulse (44%) and the Blood pressure (69%) of the patient was not entered. The presenting complaints were not recorded in 2% cases and alleged history was not written in 3% of the cases.

Intimation to Police

For every case the police intimation was sent. For those jurisdictions which are at a long-distance communication was sent by telephone.



Figure

Table No.1: Type of Medicolegal case

Type of Medicolegal Case	Male	Female	Total no. of Cases
RTA	318	104	422
Poisoning	58	39	97
Fall from height	41	12	53
Assault	42	09	51
Burns	17	09	26
Asphyxia cases	01	03	4

Discussion

In the present study it was found that in some cases the relevant information was not documented properly. As medicolegal documentation is vital in the court of law it is essential for the hospital authorities to ensure proper training by forensic experts so that the litigations does not arise.

The study shows majority of cases (about 65%) arrived to emergency department were road traffic accidents and males were involved more. The emergency medicine should be equipped with well trained staff for the immediate resuscitative measures and then after the Medicolegal documentation.

The younger age group was the most suffered victims in our study. Hence the govt. shall impose stringent laws and safety awareness campaigns to reduce road traffic accidents.

In most of the records time of incidence was recorded, a key to know the time taken to approach for treatment so that an aggressive management can be started immediately in delayed cases.

Sangeeta Regge et al in a study concluded that due to ambiguity in the understanding the MLC, more and more health care professionals are looking at MLC as a burden. Their study suggested that there was a need of standard operating procedures in the context of doctors, nurses and police and their respective medicolegal roles⁶.

For proper training in medico-legal documentation, the casualty must be attached to and supervised by the Forensic Medicine department and interns and postgraduates in Forensic Medicine should be posted⁷.

While conducting the auditing, the auditor shall not only study the cases but ensure to look on the maintenance of registers, their proper storage for the time period as per the laws of that land, provide information to the authorities for necessary changes and their implementation for better functioning of organization. Another major concern is maintaining confidentiality of the patient records as the patient can hold the doctor and the hospital negligent for breaking confidentiality of his records⁸.

Conclusion

The suggestions that can be provided by well performed audit are

a. Designing SOPs for healthcare workers with respect to medico-legal work

b. Continuous monitoring of health records documentation in addition to medicolegal cases

c. Improvement in the healthcare services and maintenance of documents based on the review of audit and patient feedback

Ethical Clearance: Obtained from institutional ethics committee (I.E.C, NRIIMS;

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