

Original Research:

Awareness, Knowledge and Attitude Towards Medical Ethics among Medical Students - A Questionnaire based Study

Shikha Shajil¹, Siddesh Revpla Channabasappa², V Dekal³

¹Phase II MBBS Student, ²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Forensic Medicine, ³Professor & HOD, Dept. of Forensic Medicine, Saveetha Medical College, Saveetha University, Thandalam Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Abstract

Introduction: Ethics is concerned with moral principles for the members of the medical profession in their dealings with each other, their patients and the State. A physician must uphold dignity and honour of his profession. He must render service to humanity and should maintain good medical practices. A physician must provide highest quality assurance in patient care. Duties of physician towards sick include obligation to sick, must be patient while treating them. Its an era of litigation against medical professionals. Awareness, Knowledge of medical ethics during MBBS phase is need of the hour to prevent these.

Aims & Objectives: • The study aims to assess Awareness, Knowledge and Attitude towards medical ethics among medical students in a teaching hospital.

• To suggest and implement necessary changes in the medical curriculum like AETCOM module to train them & to focus on ethical practices.

Materials and Methods: A Prospective, cross sectional questionnaire-based study was carried out among medical students of Saveetha Medical College hospital, Chennai. The Medical Students from Phase II & Phase III MBBS were approached and the questionnaires were sent to about 250 medical students, out of which 216 responses were recorded & included in the study. Received responses/results were tabulated and statistically analysed, depicted in observations.

Conclusion: There are no potential risks in the study. Study helps to identify the amount of awareness of medical ethics among medical students and also to stress on the need for awareness programs on medical ethics. The medical students may not have sufficient knowledge towards medical ethics, need much training among medical students through Value added courses on Ethics and AETCOM module of CBME curriculum in future throughout the curriculum.

Key Words: Medical Ethics, Medical Students, CBME curriculum, AETCOM

Introduction

Ethics is concerned with moral principles for the members of the medical profession in their dealings

with each other, their patients and the State. It is a self-imposed code of conduct assumed voluntarily by medical professionals.^{1,2}

A physician must uphold dignity and honour of his profession. He must render service to humanity and should maintain good medical practices. A physician must provide highest quality assurance in patient care. Duties of physician towards sick include obligation to sick, must be patient while treating them. All consultation must be carried out for patient benefit, the

Corresponding Author:

Dr V Dekal

Professor & HOD, Dept. Of Forensic Medicine,
Saveetha Medical College, Saveetha University,
Thandalam Chennai, Tamil Nadu, Pin: 602105
Mail- rcsiddesh@gmail.com, Ph- 9474268729

physician must be punctual and available for it and good treatment must be provided after consultation. Physician must display fees for consultation and treatment in the hospital and prescription letter head must include name, designation and registration. Physicians should maintain good conduct during consultation without engaging in rivalry with other physicians. If a physician is called for consultation, the consultant must not take charge of the case on the solicitations of patient or friends. A substitute physician can attend patients in other physician's absence only when he has capacity to discharge additional responsibility along with his own duties.³

Unethical acts which should not be performed by a doctor include using his/her name as subject in any form of advertising, running an open shop for dispensing prescriptions prescribed by other doctors other than himself or which causes exploitation of patient, patented surgical instruments or appliances are not made available in situations where interest of large population is involved. A physician must never receive or give commission in any form. He must never give secret remedies or medicines to patients of which he is unaware of the composition, mode of action and adverse effects. A doctor must preserve human rights and should never help in euthanasia.^{3,4}

There has been growing public awareness regarding the ethical conduct of medical practitioners and complaints against physicians appear to be escalating. This may reflect an increase in unethical practices by doctors or increasing public awareness of such unethical practices.⁵

Doctors are called to court to give expert witness regarding assault cases, poisoning cases etc. Due to lack of proper medico-legal knowledge, most of the doctors are very badly exposed in courts. Every doctor should realise that irrespective of the post graduate speciality they choose, throughout their career they have to deal with medico-legal cases. Hence, they should have sufficient knowledge about medico-legal aspects whether they work in private clinics or government hospitals.^{6,7} Doctors have several ethical, moral and legal obligations in their duties. It is therefore very important that every doctor understands the nature of these obligations and fulfil these obligations to the best of their ability.⁸

Keeping the above facts in mind, a study was done to assess medical students about the knowledge of medical ethics and attitude towards it and also to make them aware of this important subject so that they can effectively handle medico-legal cases.

Aims & Objectives

- The study aims to assess Awareness, Knowledge and Attitude towards medical ethics among medical students in a teaching hospital.
- To suggest and implement necessary changes in the medical curriculum like AETCOM module to train them & to focus on ethical practices.

Materials and Methods

A Prospective, cross sectional questionnaire-based study was carried out among medical students of Saveetha Medical College hospital, Chennai. The Medical Students from Phase II & Phase III MBBS were approached and total 216 medical students' responses were included in the study. Those who were refused to participate and those who were not accessed our google doc questionnaire were excluded from the study. Willingness for participating in the survey is recorded before initiating the questionnaire in the google doc document. They were informed that the questionnaire is the part of study and they are free to accept or deny completing it. A self-administered, structured questionnaire written in English which covered various aspects of Ethics in the Medical practice was given for all participants to assess awareness, knowledge and attitude towards medical ethics. The questionnaire was pretested on a group of 14 medical students, who were excluded from the study and questionnaire was modified accordingly. The questionnaire was asked through online google doc format. The questionnaires were sent to about 250 medical students of Phase II & III MBBS out of which 216 responses we got & included in the study. Received responses were tabulated and statistically analysed. Results are tabulated, analysed using SPSS software version-16.0. The student's t-test, ANOVA test were used as tests of significance for statistical evaluation. The level of significance was set at $P \leq 0.05$.

Results and Observations

Total 216 medical students participated in the

questionnaire-based study on awareness, knowledge and attitude towards medical ethics among medical students. The results of the study shown that out of 216 students, 194 (89.8%) medical students felt that service to humanity is a doctor's primary objective and 20 (9.2%) students felt that it may be a doctor's primary objective. Amongst all participants, 208 (96.2%) students had opinion that it is important for a doctor to be punctual during consultation, 8 students felt it may be important. Majority (97.2 %) of students gave answer that a physician must protect patient confidentiality, 2 students felt it is not important for a physician to protect it and 4 students felt it may be important for a physician to protect it. Out of 216 students, 160 (74%) felt a doctor must not include his/her name, 42(19.4%) students felt maybe a doctor can include his/her name, 6 students didn't know whether a doctor can include his/her name as subject in advertising and 8 students felt a doctor must include his/her name as a subject in any form of advertising. Most (87.9%) of the students felt a physician cannot give a particular drug to patients without being sure of the uses, adverse effects and composition of drug, 10 (4.6%) students felt a physician can give and 14 (6.4%) students felt maybe a physician can give such a drug. Majority of students (95.3%) felt that, a doctor should not criticize another doctor, 8 students felt maybe a doctor can criticize

another doctor. Amongst 216 participants, 144 (66.6%) students felt it is necessary for a physician to involve the patient while making decisions regarding management of patient, 50 (23.1%) students felt it is maybe necessary to involve patient and 22(10.1%) students felt it is not necessary to involve patient. Most of the (94.4%) students had opinion that it is important for a physician to listen and respect patient's views while treating patients, 12 (5.5%) students felt it is maybe important to listen and respect patient's views. The highest number, i.e., 214 (99%) students felt that it is not advisable for a doctor to associate with pharmaceutical company or with touts or with another doctor for benefits. Most of the students (89.3%) felt it is mandatory to provide pre and post-operative instructions to patients, 21 (9.7%) students felt it is maybe mandatory to provide pre and post-operative instructions. Majority of (97.2%) students felt that, it is unethical for a doctor to issue false certificate to his/her friend or relative and 6 students felt it is maybe unethical to issue such a certificate. Almost all of the students (99.5 %) felt it is unethical for a doctor to leave a patient during emergency on the basis of gender, religion & socio-economic status. Majority of participants (216) opined in 'Any other comments' section that they need more training in medical ethics & law for their future clinical practice.

Questionnaire Table:

Sl.no	Question	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know
1.	Do you feel service to humanity is a doctor's primary objective?	194	2	20	0
2.	Is it important for a doctor to be punctual during consultation?	208	0	8	0
3.	Do you feel a physician must protect patient privacy & confidentiality? (Including patient's personal information and treatment details)	210	2	4	0
4.	Can a doctor include his/her name as subject in any form of advertising?	8	160	42	6
5.	Can a physician give a particular medical drug to patients when he/she is not sure of uses, adverse effects and composition of drug?	10	190	14	2

Cont... Questionnaire Table:

6.	Is it okay for a doctor to criticize another doctor in front of his patients?	2	206	8	0
7.	Is it necessary for a physician to take informed consent & involve the patient while making decisions regarding management of patient?	144	22	50	0
8.	Is listening and respecting patient's views important while treating patients?	204	0	12	0
9	Is it advisable for a doctor to associate with pharmaceutical company or with touts or with another doctor for benefits?	0	214	0	2
10	Is it mandatory to provide pre & post-operative instructions to the patient?	193	2	21	0
11	Do you feel Issuing false certificate to his/her friend/relative is unethical?	210	0	6	0
12	Do you feel Leaving the patient during emergency on the basis of gender/religion/SE status by a doctor is unethical?	215	0	1	0

Discussion

More awareness and knowledge about medical ethics among medical students is brought by teaching it in medical colleges and also by clinical exposure in hospitals. This study gives us an insight into various aspects of medical ethics. The current study showed us about the degree of awareness, knowledge and attitude towards Medical Ethics among medical students.

Most of the medical students (95.3%) felt that a doctor cannot criticize another doctor in front of his patients which is similar to study done by Jatna SK in a medical college in Malaysia in 2018.⁹ A majority of medical students (87.9%) in the study felt that a physician cannot prescribe a drug without being sure of composition of drug which is similar to the results obtained in a study by Arun Babu T in medical college in Pondicherry¹⁰. Majority of participants in this study (97.2%) felt that a physician must protect patient privacy and confidentiality which is in accordance with the study conducted by Ramesh P Aacharya in a medical college in Kathmandu ¹¹.

Most of the students (66.6%) felt that it is necessary for a doctor to involve patient while making decisions regarding patient management which is similar to the

study conducted by Jatna SK in a medical college in Malaysia.⁹ Almost all the medical students(99.5%) felt that leaving a patient during emergency on the basis of gender/religion/SE status by doctor is unethical which is similar to study done by Jatna SK in medical college in Malaysia. ⁹

Conclusion

There are no potential risks in the study. Study helps to identify the amount of awareness of medical ethics among medical students and also to stress on the need for awareness programs on medical ethics. The medical students may not have sufficient knowledge towards medical ethics, need much training among medical students through Value added courses on Ethics and AETCOM module of CBME curriculum in future throughout the curriculum.

Ethical Clearance: Ethical Clearance was obtained from Institutional Ethics Committee, Saveetha Medical College, Chennai prior to the study. Consent was taken from each respondent. Confidentiality was maintained.

Source of Funding: Self

Conflict of Interest: Nil

References

1. K S N Reddy, O.P. MURTY, The Essentials of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, 33rd edition; 35-41
2. G. Biswas, Review of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, 3rd edition; 05-18.
3. Catherine Soanes. 2001.The compact Oxford Reference Dictionary. Oxford University Press.
4. Akoijam Brogen,S, Bishwalata Rajkumari, Jalina Laishram and Akoijam Joy.2009.
5. Sharma BR,Harish D,Chavali KH.Teaching, training and practice of Forensic medicine in India:An overview.JIAFM,2005;27(4):247-51.
6. Shilekh Mittal,Garg Sonia,Singh Mittal Moneeshindra.Need of forensic Medicine in trauma care.Medico-Legal Update,2007;7(3):81-6.
7. Khandekar Indrajit, Tirpude Bipinchandra et al.Development of Clinical Forensic medicine in India:A need of time.J Indian Acad Forensic Med.,2012;32(1):8590.
8. Dr.Shreemant Kumar Dash,2010.Medical ethics,Duties and Medical Neglience Awareness among the Practitioners in a Teaching Medical College,Hospital -A Survey J Indian Acad Forensic Med,32(2), P-153
9. Jatna SK,Soe HHK,Phyu KL,Lwin H,Tham NN.A survey on knowledge and Attitudes towards Medical Ethics among Undergraduate medical students.Education.2018;8:48-53.
10. Arun TB,Venkatesh C,Sharmila V.Are tomorrow's doctors aware of the code of medical ethics?Indian J Med Ethics.2013 Jul-Sep;10(3):192-4.
11. Acharya RP and Shakya YL.Knowledge ,attitude and practice of medical ethics among medical intern students in a Medical College in Kathmandu. Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics 2015 ; 6(3).