**“*Knowledge and attitude related to Medical Ethics among Medical Students”***

**ABSTRACT**

There has been growing public awareness regarding the ethical conduct of medical practitioners, and complaints against physicians appear to be escalating. After completing their studies, healthcare professionals are expected to know ethical principles and apply them in their clinical practice. Hence, this study was conducted to assess the knowledge and attitude of medical ethics among final year medical students. This study was carried out among 135 medical students using pre tested self administered questionnaire. Study results showed Majority 87% of students felt patient wishes must always be adhered to. In contrast 65% of students felt doctors must do what is best irrespective of patient’s opinion. The fact that many respondents had neutral opinion to some questions may indicate their lack of awareness or knowledge in that area and their inability to decide. Hence there should be sufficient training classes, workshops, conferences to stress the importance of ethical practice

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**Introduction**

Ethics is the study of morality – careful and systematic analysis of moral decisions and behaviors and practicing those decisions. Medical ethics is concerned with moral values and judgment as it applies to medicine.1 Goal of ethics education is to enable students to identify difficult situations and deal with them in a rational and principled manner. Ethics education aims to help medical students understand moral principles and analyze and define their own values

Medical practice throughout the world has become increasingly commercialized, and ethics has taken a backseat. There has been growing public awareness regarding the ethical conduct of medical practitioners, and complaints against physicians appear to be escalating.2 This increase in litigation against doctors is issue of immediate concern. How doctors are trained, is regarded as a key element in determining the ethical and legal conduct within the healthcare sector However, on qualifying, healthcare professionals are expected to know about ethical practice during application of their skills.

Training in medical ethics has been made mandatory in the undergraduate curriculum by the regulatory body of medical education, the Medical Council of India (MCI).Medical Council of India in 2002 released its code of ethics which was a regulatory document on professional conduct, etiquette, and ethics of doctors.3 Dearth’s of specialists in bioethics and a lack of organized human resources have led to lack of appreciation of the urgent need to include bioethics in medical education in India.

The first step in formulating an ethics curriculum may be to determine the level of the basic knowledge and attitudes of the medical students. Hence, this study was planned to assess the knowledge and attitude of medical ethics among undergraduates who are future of the society to practice the art of cure.

**Methodology**

This cross sectional study was carried among final year medical students in private medical college, Coimbatore during July 2016. After obtaining permission from Institutional ethics committee, the purpose of the study and nature of information which has to be furnished from the students was explained to them. Willingness to participate in the study was obtained from participants using written consent form. Those who are on leave, refused to participate were excluded from the study. Data was collected among 135 students using a self administered questionnaire. It was ensured that respondents understood the meaning of questions as well. Questionnaire included demographic details and 14 questions on everyday ethical issues. They were asked if they agreed or disagreed with certain statements concerning ethical conduct, autonomy, paternalism, confidentiality, informing patients about wrongdoing and informing relatives about the patient’s condition, informed consent. The respondents were asked to grade their responses on a 3 point Likert scale where the possible responses are strongly agree, agree no opinion, disagree, or strongly disagree. Collected data was entered in Excel and results were expressed in proportions

**Results:**

Out of 140 final year students 135 students participated in the study. In this study 56% of participants were female and 44% were males. The mean age group of participants was 22 years

Table 1 describes student’s knowledge and attitude regarding medical ethics.

Most(73%) of the students felt patients must always be informed about wrong doing by anyone involved in his/her treatment. Though majority 87% of them agreed that patient wishes must be adhered on the other hand 65% of students felt doctor should do what is best irrespective of the patient’s opinion. Around 46% of them disagreed for the statement confidentiality cannot be maintained in modern care. Nearly 64.7% of them disagreed consent is required only in case of operations and not for tests and medications. Only 36% of them disagreed certain medical practitioners charging more from rich patients to compensate for treating the poor is a good practice and 28% of the students were uncertain about this. 30% agreed and 18% were uncertain as to whether Ethical conduct is important only to avoid legal action. Majority (71%) of the students agreed that ethical issues of patient care must also be discussed during clinical rounds. Nearly half (47%) of the students were of opinion privacy of the patient must not be ignored for benefit of larger group and 20% of them were uncertain about this. Majority of students (71%) agreed that children should never be treated without the consent of their parents or guardian except in case of emergency. Only 30% of students disagreed the statement it’s better to use brand name rather than generic name of drug in ones practice. Most of them (65%) of them felt clinically confirmed case must undergo laboratory investigation as a routine (Table: 1)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Issues in Medical Ethics | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree (%) |
| Patient should always be informed of wrong doing by anyone involved in his/her treatment | 99(73.5) | 25(18.6) | 11(7.8) |
| Patients’ wishes should always be adhered to | 117(87.2) | 10(7.8) | 8(5.6) |
| The doctor should do what is best irrespective of the patient’s opinion | 87(64.7) | 25(18.6) | 23(16.6) |
| Confidentiality cannot be maintained in modern care | 33(24.5) | 40(29.4) | 62(46) |
| Close relatives must always be told about the  patient’s condition | 83(61.7) | 25(18.4) | 27(19.6) |
| Consent is required only in case of operations and not for tests and medications | 30(22.5) | 18(12.7) | 87(64.7) |
| Certain medical practitioners charging more from rich patients to compensate for treating the poor is a  good practice | 49(36.2) | 38(28.4) | 48(35.2) |
| Ethical conduct is important only for avoiding  legal action | 41(30.3) | 25(18.6) | 69(50.9) |
| During clinical rounds along with clinical aspects of a patient’s care, it is also essential to discuss ethical issues of that patient | 97(71.5) | 25(18.6) | 13(9.8) |
| Privacy of one patient may be ignored for the benefit of the larger group | 44(32.3) | 28(20.5) | 63(47) |
| Children (except in emergency) should never be treated without the consent of their parents or guardian | 99(73.5) | 16(11.7) | 20(14.7) |
| If law allows abortion, doctors must not refuse  to do abortion | 91(67.6) | 30(22.5) | 14(9.8) |
| In one’s practice it is better to use the brand name than the generic name of a drug | 54(40.1) | 40(29.4) | 41(30.3) |
| Clinically confirmed cases should also undergo laboratory investigations as a routine | 89(65.6) | 18(13.7) | 28(20.5) |

**Table 1: Distribution of students according to knowledge & attitude in Medical Ethics**

**Discussion:**

In our study majority 73% of students agreed that patient should always be informed of wrong doing by anyone involved in his/her treatment which is similar to study by Angadi etal4 78% but lesser compared to study by Mohammed etal5  83%.This difference could be due to study conducted by Mohammed etal5 was among practicing physicians.

Students often expressed contradictory views in different areas of ethical issues e.g. while dealing with treatment of patients, most students(87%) agreed to adhering to “patient’s wishes”, on the other hand nearly 65% of the students felt that “doctor should do what is best” irrespective of patients opinion. Similar to study conducted by Biswath chatterjee6 in West Bengal. Majority of respondents disagreed on the statements that doctors should reveal the patient’s condition to close relatives irrespective of whether the patient gave permission and children should not be treated without the parents’ consent (61.9%).7

In our study only 22% agreed consent is necessary only for operations and not for medications and laboratory test similar to study by Chandrasekhar janakiraman8 among medical post graduate students in South India. Fifty percent of students disagree that ethical conduct is important only to avoid legal actions similar to multi centric studyconducted among physicians.9 Majority of students (71%) felt ethical aspects related to patients care must be discussed during clinical rounds similar to study (68%) by Chatterjje etal among medical students. Only (10%) of students disagreed if law allows abortion doctors must not refuse to do abortion similar to study (15%) conducted by Subramanian etal among physicians in Chennai9 this could be due to students in our study is not sure about the rights of a doctor. In the present study 40% felt it is better to use brand name rather than generic name during giving prescription to patients and 30% of them dint have any opinion. Similar to study among medical undergraduate students in Karnataka.5

In our study (65%) of students felt clinically confirmed cases should also undergo laboratory investigations as a routine similar to study done among health care professionals.9,10

**Conclusion:**

This study findings indicate a gap exist in knowledge about practical aspects of health care among students. Contradictory views in different areas of ethical issues like dealing with treatment of patients and adhering to patient wishes exist. The fact that many respondents had neutral opinion to some questions may indicate their lack of awareness or knowledge in that area and their inability to decide. Hence there should be sufficient training classes, workshops, conferences to stress the importance of ethical practice and to make the students confident enough to deal the ethical dilemma

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