

Table 2: Preference in consulting on an ethical problem

Whom to consult	Physicians (%)	Nurses (%)
Colleague	58	35
Supervisor	47	33
Head of Department	49	51
Chief of Medical staff	23	0
Matron	0	40
Hospital Administrator	8	29
Ethics Committee	36	17
Professional Association	20	17
Priest	8	33
Text, Internet	13	4
Close friend/family	9	25

mittee is performing its role satisfactorily. Among the physicians who were not aware of an ethics committee in the hospital, a quarter responded that there is a definite role for an ethics committee. Among those who were aware of an ethics committee at the hospital nearly half of physicians and nurses felt that its role is to advise the administration on ethics rules in the institution, to advise the staff and patients on ethical problems arising out of work and to teach ethical conduct. One-third of physicians and nurses felt that the role of an ethics committee is to ensure that research is conducted properly.

Table 4 depicts the responses of physicians and nurses regarding the various aspects of practicing ethics. There was a statistically significant difference between the opinions of physicians and nurses with respect to adherence to patients' wishes, confidentiality, paternalistic attitude of doctors, consent for procedures and treating violent/non-compliant patients. The doctors were stronger in their opinions than the nurses in these issues. There were no differences in the strength of the opinions regarding other issues such as informing patient regarding wrongdoing, informing close relative of a patient, seeking consent for children, abortion and euthanasia, where doctors and nurses were equally opinionated in these issues.

Table 5 shows the responses about the usefulness of the instruments to learn ethics and law. Panel discussions and

workshops seemed to be useful instruments in most respondents.

Discussion

The findings of the present study clearly show the difference in the knowledge and attitudes between physicians and nurses regarding the medical ethics and law. The respondents were representative of different levels of physicians and nursing staff consisting of junior physicians inclusive of post-graduates, consultant physicians, nurses and sisters-in-charge and the responses were reflective of these categories.

The frequency of encountering the ethical and legal problems was a full spectrum ranging from "never" to "every day". Junior physicians and nurses responded that they encountered an ethical problem more often than the consultant physicians and sisters-in-charge, perhaps due to their more frequent contact with patients. The concern here is that it has to be assumed that although the junior staff had often encountered some form of ethical problem, it might not have been brought to the notice of the senior staff. Because the senior staff should act as mentors to their juniors, it is important that they should have been made aware of the problems that do arise. However it is unsure whether the juniors are perceiving problems where there are none. This may also imply that while offering training about law, ethics and the role of ethical commit-

Table 3: Preference in consulting on a legal problem

Whom to consult	Physicians (%)	Nurses (%)
Colleague	31	31
Supervisor	40	32
Chief of Medical staff	20	0
Matron	0	39
Hospital Administrator	21	23
Professional insurance company	29	0
Trade Union	24	26
Lawyer	45	54