

Perception of II MBBS Students in Learning Medical Ethics - Need of the Hour

Priya Banthavi S¹, Anupriya A^{2*}, Nivethitha T³, Kamala E⁴, Guru T. Arun⁵, Prabhusaran N², Sunil Kumar R²

¹Department of Pathology, Trichy SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre (Affiliated to the Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University), Tiruchirapalli, India

²Microbiology, Trichy SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre (Affiliated to the Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University), Tiruchirapalli, India

³Pharmacology, Trichy SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre (Affiliated to the Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University), Tiruchirapalli, India

⁴Anatomy, Trichy SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre (Affiliated to the Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University), Tiruchirapalli, India

⁵Radiodiagnosis, Trichy SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre (Affiliated to the Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University), Tiruchirapalli, India

*Corresponding author: Anupriya A

| Received: 03.05.2019 | Accepted: 12.05.2019 | Published: 22.05.2019

DOI: [10.21276/sjpm.2019.4.5.2](https://doi.org/10.21276/sjpm.2019.4.5.2)

Abstract

Medical ethics is an important code for the clinical practitioners in order to understand public health interventions. Various ethical dilemmas are observed in various environments thereby standardization of institutional policies and regulations are not initiated. Thus this study was aimed to analyze the perception of learning medical ethics among undergraduate medical students. A standardized, pre tested questionnaire was used to interpret the data thereby their knowledge and attitude towards practicing medical ethics in their profession. As a result, 64.9% accepted the importance of informed consent; most of them (95.3%) attended bioethics training programme. Social media (64.9%) play a vital role in imparting knowledge about medical ethics than other sources. Most of the participants accepted that consent is required for surgery alone than for investigations and medications. Further the corresponding author also conducting a simple survey for assessing the knowledge among medical students resulting of clinical case records (73.7%) followed by simulated patient interaction and multiple choice questions. This study is to be extended with more number of participants with multiple institutional involvement and other medical disciplines to finalize the data.

Keywords: Medical Ethics, Undergraduates, Knowledge, Attitude.

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INTRODUCTION

Medical ethics is concerned with moral values and judgement as it applies to medicine. Ethics education aims to help medical students understand moral principles and analyze and define their moral values. Medical students are taught various subjects to tackle medical problems; they also need ethics to solve the moral quandaries which they are likely to face in their practice in the future. Medical ethics are integral to all clinical encounters and public health interventions and a strong foundation of this has to be laid down at this hour [1].

Ethical dilemmas are usually encountered in areas like abortion, contraception, maintaining patient's confidentiality, traditional medicine, transplants etc. Medical Council of India in 2002 [2] has released its code of ethics which was a regulatory document on professional conduct, etiquette and ethics of doctors.

Against this back ground idea, this study was planned to assess the perception of II MBBS students in learning medical ethics who are the future of the society to practice the art of patient care.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This is a cross sectional prospective survey study which was conducted among II MBBS students between June and August 2018. A total of 152 study participants were included (no sampling analysis performed). This study was approved by Institutional Ethical Committee thereby the purpose of the study was explained to each student and comprehensive informed written consent was obtained from those participants before getting enrolled in this study.

A self administered, pre tested and semi-structured questionnaire was designed based on previous research publications and in consultation with

the faculty members of Bioethics unit of the study institution. Few questions were derived from Code of Ethics laid by Medical Council of India (MCI) and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). This questionnaire was tested among eight undergraduate students and few modifications were done and incorporated onto the final questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed with simple descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respond rate of the study population was 148 (97.4%); of which 70 (47.3%) were male and 78 (52.7%) were female. Most of them are actively

participated and provided the complete answers. As the University insisted to provide awareness to the medical graduates regarding code of medical ethics, the bioethics unit of institution took necessary schedule to conduct classes. In continuation of that, after four months, the awareness rate was assessed among the participants. Most of them felt the importance of knowing medical ethics (83.8%). Social media playing a vital role in order to provide the basic to intermediate knowledge; thereby this study also confirmed the same with 64.9% (Table-1). All participants had attended the training programme on medical ethics based on the MCI guidelines [2].

Table-1: Knowledge on medical ethics

Knowledge	Number of respondents		
	Important	Part of profession	Rarely needed
How important are medical ethics in your profession	124 (83.8)	21 (14.2)	3 (2)
Source of your knowledge	Seminar/presentations		11 (7.4)
	Social Media		96 (64.9)
	Experiences shared by senior professors		41(27.8)
Have you attended training program in Bioethics	Yes 141 (95.3)	No 7 (4.7)	
Have you taken informed consent	Yes 96 (64.9)	No 52 (35.1)	
Is there an ethics committee in your Institute	Yes 148 (100)	No -	

[Figure in parenthesis denote percentages]

The attitude among the students about the medical ethics showed variations among the questionnaire due their different views and perceptions. Accordingly, 68.9% were disagreed the importance of ethical practice to avoid legal actions. Maximum

(73.6%) agreed that the need of discussing social, ethical and legal aspects during clinical rounds itself. The other parameters were also disagreed with other parameters (Table-2).

Table-2: Attitude of students in practicing Medical ethics

Attitude	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Ethical conduct is important only to avoid legal action	102 (68.9)	35 (23.6)	11 (7.5)
During clinical rounds along with clinical aspects of teaching it is necessary to discuss social, ethical and legal aspects	37 (25)	2 (1.4)	109 (73.6)
Doctor should do what is best irrespective of patients opinion	96 (64.9)	-	52 (35.1)
Patient should always be informed if something goes wrong	93 (62.8)	14 (9.5)	41 (27.7)
Consent is required only for operation and not for investigations and medications	98 (66.2)	18 (12.2)	32 (21.6)

[Figure in parenthesis denote percentages]

After training programme, the assessment of the bioethics classes was also evaluated thereby all the participants refused the short answers and essays and

they all like to provide their feedback through clinical cases and simulated patient interactions; very few opted for MCQs (Table-3).

Table-3: Assessment on medical ethics

	Type of assessment	NO (%)
1	Multiple choice questions	10(6.7)
2	Short answers	-
3	Essays	2(1.4)
4	Simulaated patient interaction	27(18.2)
5	Clinical cases - routine patients	109(73.7)

Ethical issues arise everyday in day to day clinical practice. Due to the advancement in medical science and technology, it is the need of the hour to deliberate medical students about medical ethics, the time when they enter into clinical postings. The response rate for this study was 96.1% (148/ 154), there by the results can be taken as representative awareness of II MBBS students and the same picture was depicted in other studies [3, 4]. In the present study, nearly 83.8% of students have felt that medical ethics are important in this current profession and the same was also concurred [5].

The source of knowledge about medical ethics assessed in this study revealed that social media (64.9%), followed by experiences shared by teachers (27.8%) and then through lectures on medical ethics (7.4%). This is in contrary to the previous studies done in different parts [5, 6]. Scary of information in Indian studies was observed while evacuating the literature. This might be due to the fact that assault on doctors and other issues relating to the practice of medicine has been repeatedly telecasting in Social media like internet, news papers and television whereby the students become more aware of it and are keenly interested in learning and knowing more on ethics.

In the present study, only 64.9% of students have obtained informed consent which is slightly lower than the other study with 73% [3] and 78% [7] and very less when compared to the study with 83% [6]. This could be due to the reason that the students have just finished their pre-clinical subjects and entered into clinical teaching. As they go to the next phases of MBBS, they would probably interact with more patients and obtain informed consent.

All the 148 respondents are aware of the availability of Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC), but they did not know the specific functions of IEC. This emphasizes the need for taking more classes on ethics which covers the regulation and functioning aspects of IEC in detail for encouraging the future doctors to follow ethical practices.

In the current study, most students disagreed (68.9%) the context "Ethical conduct is important to avoid legal action", few students (7.5%) support this context while the remaining felt it depends upon the clinical scenario (23.6%) and this data correlated with previous study [5]. Nearly 64.9% support patients autonomy whereas 35.1% students support paternalistic attitude. Autonomy is the core principle of medical ethics and those students who were for paternalism also quoted the level of understanding medical terms and other related issues depends upon the level of knowledge of the patients. More teaching sessions or real life experiences must be shared to these students so that they understand the principle of Autonomy.

In our study most students (66.2%) are aware of the components of Informed Consent and it applies not only to surgeries but also to any procedures/ investigations/ medications [1, 8, 9]. In the present study 73.7% students wanted clinical case presentation on routine patients while a few of them wanted simulated patient interactions (18.7%) and very few wanted MCQs for assessment. For any training or activities, evaluation of understanding and acceptance is very important, thereby the authors strongly suggesting to have a report of evaluation that should assess the ethical and legal aspects during clinical practice. Instead of having a summative assessment, students should undergo formative assessment and 360 degree feedback also to be obtained from all Stake holders and policy makers.

CONCLUSION

The knowledge and attitude among medical students regarding bioethics was satisfactory though few students were deficient in knowledge. The students attained knowledge of medical ethics from various sources, yet it requires further reinforcement in the undergraduate medical curriculum and follow-up evaluations. Through this investigation, the authors suggested the policy makers to enforce the incorporation of medical ethics in curriculum in order to emphasize the importance and to avoid the ethical and legal issues during their clinical practice.

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