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A STUDY TO ASSESS KNOWLEDGE REGARDING MEDICAL ETHICS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN SHRI B M PATIL MEDICAL COLLEGE, BIJAPUR, KARNATAKA.

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ABSTRACT

Background: "Always doing what is in the best interest of the patient" should be the ethical behavior of doctors. The recent increase in litigation against doctors is an issue of immediate concern which says that Doctors and health professionals are confronted with many ethical problems in their profession regularly. The reasons for these are social, economic, professional, judicial and others. Objective: To assess the knowledge among undergraduate medical students on medical ethics. Materials and methods: A cross sectional study was conducted on final year part I year medical students of Shri B M Patil Medical College, Bijapur Karnataka in the month of August 2013. The data was collected by students using semi structured questionnaire. Results: Out of the 136 respondents 82 (60.2%) were males and 54 (39.8%) females. In our study 70(51.5%) of the respondents were of the opinion that medical ethics is very important in their profession. Only 31(22.8%) thought by following ethical principles it's possible to avoid legal issues from the patients. 92(67.6%) of the students were in the favour of euthanasia. Conclusion: Even though the medical ethics has been included in the syllabus of MBBS by Medical Council of India the knowledge about the ethical issues was low among students. Hence there should be sufficient training classes, CME programmes, workshops, conferences to stress the importance of ethical practice and to make the doctors confident enough to deal the ethical dilemma themselves and to adopt principles for better professional efficiency.

KEY WORDS: Doctors, Ethics, Euthanasia, MCI



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INTRODUCTION

The principle objective of the medical profession is to render service to humanity with full respect for the dignity of Profession and also to the humanity. Getting reward or financial gain or any kind of benefit is a subordinate consideration. Who so-ever chooses this profession, assumes the obligation to conduct himself in accordance with its ideals. A physician should be an upright man, instructed in the art of healings. He shall keep himself pure in character and be diligent in caring for the sick; he should be modest, sober, patient, prompt in discharging his duty without anxiety; conducting himself with propriety in his profession and in all the actions of his life.¹ With the advances in recent science and technology and increased awareness about diseases its treatment complication and outcome through media or internet the patient, families and the community keeps a close watch on the health professionals with respect to the treatment and care given to them. Hence there is a shift to greater accountability to the society from the doctors. The recent increase in litigation against doctors is an issue of immediate concern which says that Doctors and health professionals are confronted with many ethical problems regularly. The reasons for these are social, economic, professional, judicial and others. Social factors include increasing media awareness about medical facts and fallacies, professional accountability, and rights of patients in terms of information, decision-making and assessing outcomes. This may be a reflection of both an increased public awareness as well as the inappropriate practices by the healthcare professionals. With the recent advances and technology available in the society, the patients expect fast cure and immediate relief from the sufferings which pressurizes doctors to act accordingly to the needs of the patients. In spite of tremendous advances in healthcare resulting in the prolongation of life and the cure or amelioration of previously incurable conditions, many communities express dissatisfaction about the care they receive. Dissatisfaction is reflected in

expressions about poor ethical conduct within the healthcare sector and an increasing use of litigation against healthcare practitioners.² There is Growing public awareness regarding the ethical conduct of medical practitioners, and complaints against physicians appear to be escalating. The changing doctor-patient relationship and commercialization of modern medical practice has affected the practice of medicine.³ Hence in this scenario this study was done to assess the knowledge of undergraduates who are future of the society to practice the art of cure.

Objective

To assess the knowledge about medical ethics among final year part I undergraduate medical students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross sectional study was conducted on final year part I medical students of Shri B M Patil Medical College, Bijapur, Karnataka in the month of September 2013 after obtaining the prior permission from the concerned authority. The data was collected by students using semi structured questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 136 respondents 82 (60.2%) were males and 54 (39.8%) were females with mean age of students is 21 years. All the study participants belonged to final year part I MBBS course. In our study 70(52.7 %) of the respondents were of the opinion that medical ethics is very important in their profession. the results were comparable to the study by Biswath et al ⁴ (55.2 %) among undergraduates in the state of West Bengal. There source of knowledge being textbooks(80.1%) ,lecture classes (55.1%) and mass media (25.8%) . Around 28(20.6%) percent of the students were aware about the existence of ethical committee in there institution and its activities. In the study

done by Biswath et al⁴ only 10.9% and 57 % of respondents in the study done by Shreemath Kumar² in a teaching hospital of Orissa were aware about the presence of the ethical committee in their respective institutions. (table 1). Only 31(22.8%) were of the opinion that following ethical principles in their profession will avoid them from facing legal issues, which is higher when compared to the study done by Mohammed et al⁵ in the state of Egypt where only 4.7% thought so. Around 85(62.5%) of the respondents said they would always adhere to the patient's wishes during the course of treatment, these findings are comparable to the study done by Seetharam et al² where 65.1% and Mohammed et al⁵ where 57.8% of the respondents were of the same opinion. In our study 71(52.2%) said that irrespective of the patient's opinion doctor should give the best possible treatment to the patients.

Majority of the students 111(81.6%) said they would inform the patient about the complication that have occurred during the course of the treatment and 110 (80.9%) would inform the parents/guardians about the same. Our findings were higher when compared to the study done by Seetharam et al² (16.6%) and Biswath Chatterjee⁴ in state of West Bengal (72.9%) but lesser compared to the study done by Mohammed et al⁴ (83.6%) about informing patients about the complication that have occurred during the course of the treatment. In our present study 31(22.8%) of the respondents said it's right on the part of doctor and nurses not to treat the patients who behave violently with them. Similar findings were seen in the study done by Biswath Chatterjee et al⁴ (21.7%) and 11.7% in the study done by Mohammed et al.⁵ Nearly 91(66.9%) agreed that doctors can disclose the health condition of their patients to the concerned authority at the cost of compromising the patient's privacy only when a larger group of people or whole of the society will be benefited by it. In the study done by Biswath et al⁴ 55.9% and Mohammed et al⁵ 45.3% of the respondents too opined the same about the privacy of the patients. Around 123(90.4%) agreed that patient have a right to seek a second medical opinion about the

diagnosis, treatment and outcome of the disease in our study.(table 2) (figure 1) With respect to Medical Council Of India code of conduct implied to the doctors, 43(31.6%) in our study thought it's correct and 52.2% of the respondents in the study done by Biswath et al⁴ said it's unethical at the part of physician to print his photograph also along with his qualification and other details in the signboard and prescription letter.¹ Around 39(28.7%) were of the opinion that physician can run an open shop for dispensing medicine and other appliance prescribed by the other doctors. In our study 61(44.9%) of them said it will be better to use brand name rather than generic name of the drug during prescription to the patients whereas in the study done by Biswath et al⁴ 59.9% of the respondents said it's better to prescribe generic drug than brand name in accordance with the principle of ethical conduct.

According to the medical ethical principle every physician had to keep any certificates issued by him to any one for a minimum period of three years from the date of issue but the findings in our study where 69 (50.7%) students were aware about it is higher when compared to the study done by Shreemantha Kumar et al² where only 8% of the respondents were aware about it. In our study 89 (65.4%) of the respondents said they would prefer to go for confirmatory laboratory investigation as a routine procedure even for the clinically confirmed cases. Nearly 119(87.5%) of the students said they would treat the person even if they are unable to pay for the medical expenses on humanity grounds which is most promising finding in our study to say future doctors of India are not behind the money and there to serve humanity!!!!!!.(table 3)(figure 2) Red cross emblem is the right of doctor was said by only 17 (12.5%) students, which is much lesser than the study done by Shreemantha Kumar et al² where 43% said it's the Red cross emblem is the right of the doctor. Nearly 92(67.6%) of the students were in favour of euthanasia in case of terminal illness which is against the medical ethical code of conduct in our study which is very high when compared to studies done by Biswath et al⁴ (10.8%),

Mohammed etal ⁵ (2.3%) Shreemantha kumar etal ² (10%) and Xavire Babu ⁶ (38%) . Around 109(80.1%) of students in our study were

aware about obtaining ethical clearance is must before starting any research or study.(table 4)(figure 3).

Table 1
Knowledge of medical students about ethics.(n=136)

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Is it necessary to have knowledge regarding ethical issues in meical profession	Yes	133	97.7
	No	3	2.3
If yes , how important it is to practice (n = 133)	Important	63	47.3
	Very important	70	52.7
Source of your knowledge	Lecture class	75	55.1
	Textbooks	109	80.1
	Workshops	10	7.3
	Conference	15	11
	Journals	35	25.8
	Mass media	35	25.8
Is there an ethical committee in your institution	Yes	28	20.6
	No	21	15.4
	Don't know	87	64
Preference in consulting an ethical problem	Colleague	59	43.4
	Guide	24	17.7
	Ethics committee	61	44.8
	Textbooks	7	5.1
	Internet	5	3.7

Table 2
Response of students on statements related to ethical issues.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Ethical conduct is important to avoid legal action	31(22.8)	86(63.2)	19(14)
During treatment always adhere to the Patient wishes	85(62.5)	39(28.7)	12(8.8)
Irrespective of patients opinion doctor should give the best possible treatment	71(52.2)	61(44.9)	4(2.9)
If something goes wrong during treatment patient should be informed about it	111(81.6)	24(17.6)	1(0.7)
Parents/guardians to be told always if something goes wrong during treatment	110(80.9)	23(16.9)	3(2.2)
Doctors should refuse to treat the patient who behave violently	31(22.8)	98(72)	7(5.2)
In condition where disclosure of patients/condition may benefit the society , is it mandatory to inform the authority.	91(66.9)	27(19.9)	18(13.2)
Patient have right to seek second medical opinion	123(90.4)	7(5.1)	6(4.3)

Table 3
Knowledge on code of conduct implied to medical Practitioners as per MCI

	Yes	No	Don't know
Physician may print his photograph along with his qualification and specialty	43(31.6)	84(61.8)	9(6.6)
Physician may run an open shop for dispensing drugs and appliances prescribed by other doctors	39(28.7)	80(58.8)	17(12.5)
It's better to use brand name than generic name of drug	61(44.9)	60(44.1)	15(11)
It is always necessary for a physician to keep a copy of the certificate issue by them	69(50.7)	53(39)	14(10.3)
Clinically confirmed cases should also undergo laboratory investigation as a routine	89(65.4)	34(25)	13(9.6)
Confidentiality – important in all aspects	120(88.2)	5(3.7)	11(8.1)
Consent to be taken always for (examination ,investigation, treatment, procedure)	92(67.6)	42(30.9)	2(1.5)
Will you treat the patient if he is unable to pay for medical expenses	119(87.5)	5(3.7)	12(8.8)

Table 4
Others

	Yes	No	Don't know
Red cross emblem is the right of the doctors	17(12.5)	103(75.7)	16(11.8)
Do you Favour Euthanasia	92(67.6)	34(25)	10(7.4)
Ethical clearance must for any study or research	109(80.1)	11(8.1)	16(11.8)

Figure 1
percentage wise response of students to ethical issue related statements

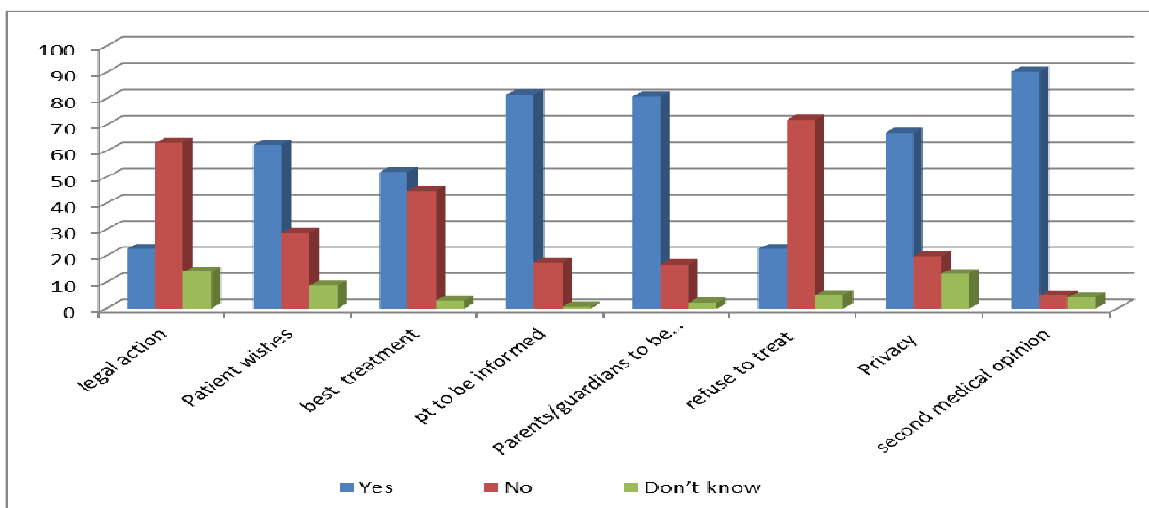


Figure 2
percentage wise distribution of response to code of conduct implied to medical Practitioners as per MCI

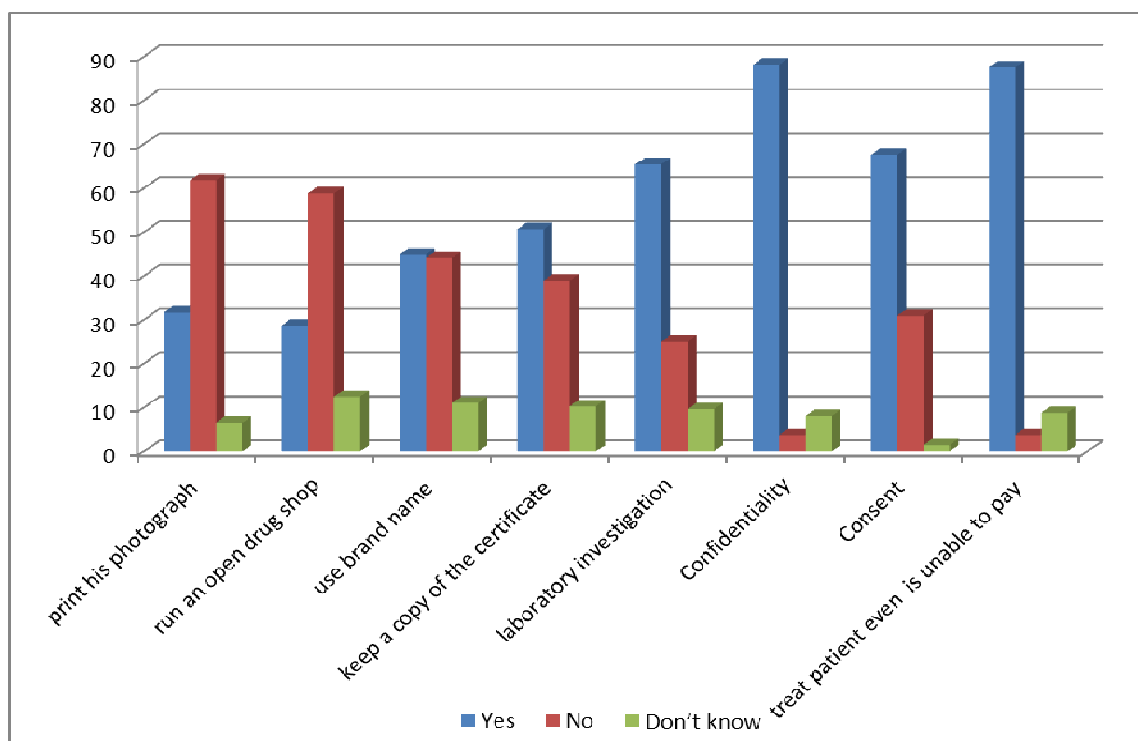
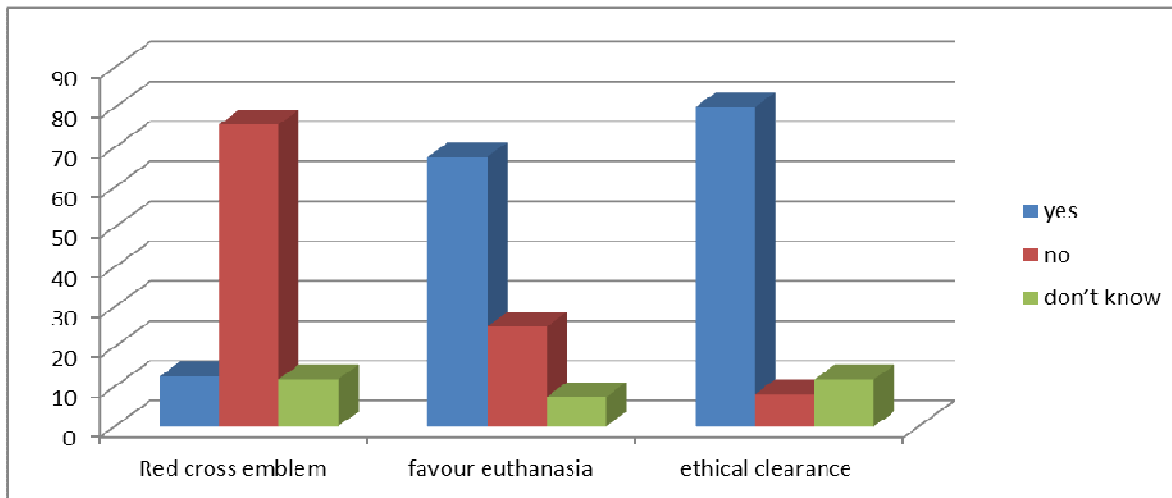


Figure 3
Percentage wise distribution of students responses to other questions.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is well known that we doctors frequently come across a lot of obligations criticism from all sections of society for unethical practices . Even though the medical ethics has been included in the syllabus of MBBS the knowledge about the ethical issues was low among the under graduates. In reality it's been very difficult to practice due to today's extremely competitive world. Even Medical Council of India has failed to ensure strict ethical standards among doctors Medical ethics should be given deserving attention in the curriculum of all health care related subjects. Physicians should try continuously to improve medical knowledge and skills and should try available to their patients and colleagues the benefits of their professional attainments by following ethical practice. The honored ideals of the medical profession imply that the responsibility of the physician extend

not only to individuals but also to society.⁷ All the articles that will be published should follow the ethical guidelines of the respective journals and abide by it.⁸ Hence there should be sufficient training classes, CME, workshops, conferences to stress the importance of ethical practice and to make the doctors confident enough to deal the ethical dilemma themselves and to adopt those. There should be strict rules and punishments to those who violate the ethical practice. A separate body should be established to deal with ethical related issues and to monitor the doctors .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors acknowledge the help received from scholars whose articles are cited and included in references of this manuscript.

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