

Original Research Article

Perception of interns and postgraduates towards Medical Ethics Education

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Medical ethics;
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Knowledge;
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Medical ethics, though integral part of medical practice is not given due importance in medical course. Few legal aspects may be taught in the Forensic Medicine Department. Knowledge about ethics is essential for emerging doctors. The existence of unethical practice by health professionals like subjecting patients for unnecessary investigations and getting percentage of monetary benefit for sending the patients for CT scan and MRI etc has been observed and heard but not documented. So, this study focuses on knowledge and practice aspects of medical ethics among the prospective practitioners. Hence a study on perception of interns and postgraduates towards medical ethics education was carried out. It describes the present level of perception of interns and postgraduates towards medical ethics education. A Cross sectional study was done using a pretested questionnaire. Data collected from 60 (53.6%) postgraduates and 52 (46.4%) interns. Only 78(69.6%) of them said that medical ethics was discussed as a part of subject during their medicine course and 11(9.8%) had attended separate session on medical ethics during their medicine course. For the question on understanding of the term "medical ethics" 60 (53.6%) of them have not responded and 24(38.5%) respondents described medical ethics as "principles, values, guidelines and rules to be followed in medical practice" and 7(13.6%) of them described as "doctor patient relationship." For the question on mentioning four bioethical principles 97(86.6%) not responded and 14 (12.8%) were able to tell more than one principle. Only 49 (82%) of the Post Graduates have informed that they took Hippocratic Oath and only 39 (65%) of the post graduates were able to mention at least 2 or 3 points in the Hippocratic Oath. For the question on mentioning few ethical practices followed by them 52 (46%) not responded and others mentioned few practices like "obtaining informed consent." For the question on mentioning unethical practices by others 61(54.5%) not responded and 51(45%) of them mentioned some of the unethical practices followed by others. In our study 108(96%) said that knowing medical ethics is important for practice and 100(89%) of them felt the need for a separate session on medical ethics for all health care providers. Medical ethics has to be discussed in detail along with the every subject during medicine course and it should be included in the final evaluation.

Introduction

Ethics has been defined as "the moral principles that govern a person's behavior or how an activity is conducted" and

medical ethics as "the branch of knowledge concerned with moral principles" (Catherine Soanes, 2001).

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 (Akoijam Brogen *et al.*, 2009). The recent increase in litigation against doctors is an issue of immediate concern. The reasons for this are social, economic, professional and judicial. 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. Negative publicity in the media about the profession has done further damage (Reddy, 2009). Doctors should familiarize themselves with the regulations and laws that concern their practice. 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 then fulfills these obligations to the best of their ability (Shreemanta Kumar Dash, 2010). Ignorance of law is no excuse for violating it. It is duty of every doctor to know the law which concerns him or her. Hence this study was carried out to assess the perception of interns and postgraduates towards medical ethics education. To describe the present level of perception of interns and postgraduates, towards medical ethics education.

Materials and Methods

A Cross sectional study was conducted in Meenakshi Medical College and Research Institute, Kancheepuram, Tamilnadu, India, during 3 months period (May, June and July 2012). All postgraduates and interns were included in the study. Those

who were not available on the 3rd visit (who was posted outside the institution for training) were excluded from the study. A structured, self administered questionnaire containing 15 items relating to knowledge and attitudes towards medical ethics was devised and pre tested. Minor changes were made to make the final instrument. The questionnaire consisted of the demographic characteristics of the respondents reach as Age, sex and previous working experiences of postgraduates, questions on their knowledge of medical ethics such as their understanding of term medical ethics, the department in which medical ethics was discussed during their medicine course, is there any need for separate course on medical ethics, some ethical practices followed by them and some unethical practices followed by others. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Institute authority. Oral informed consent was taken from each respondent. Data collected and entered and analysed in SPSS software.

Result and Discussion

Data collected from 60 (53.6%) postgraduates and 52 (46.4%) interns. Many of them 93 (83%) are in the age group of 22 – 27 years. There are 63 (56.3%) males and 49 (43.7%) females. Among post graduates 38 (63.3%) have worked in private hospitals and 26 (26.7%) of them have worked in teaching hospitals and 6 (10%) of them have worked in both places.

Only 78(69.6%) of them said that medical ethics was discussed as a part of subject during their medicine course (table – 1). Among the 78 respondents many of them 38 (49%) said that medical ethics was taught in Forensic Medicine Department (Figure – 1). Among 78 respondents 69

Table.1 Medical ethics as part of subject in medicine Course

Medical Ethics as subject in Medicine	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	78	69.6
No	34	30.4
Total	112	100.0

Figure.1 Teaching of medical ethics-department wise

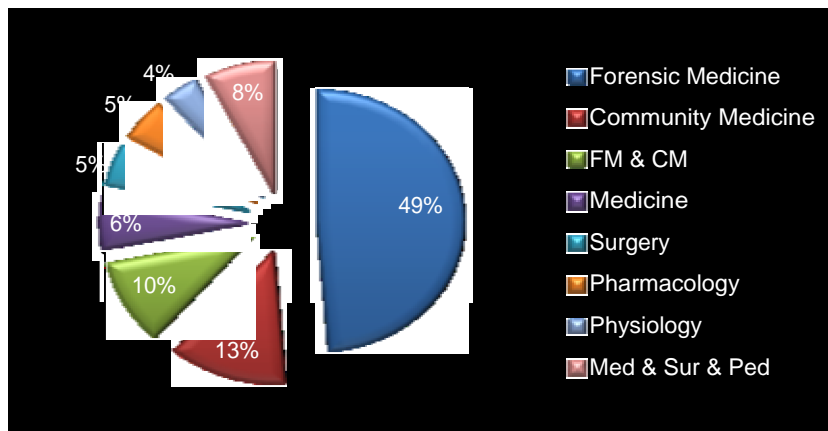


Figure.2 Description of medical ethics

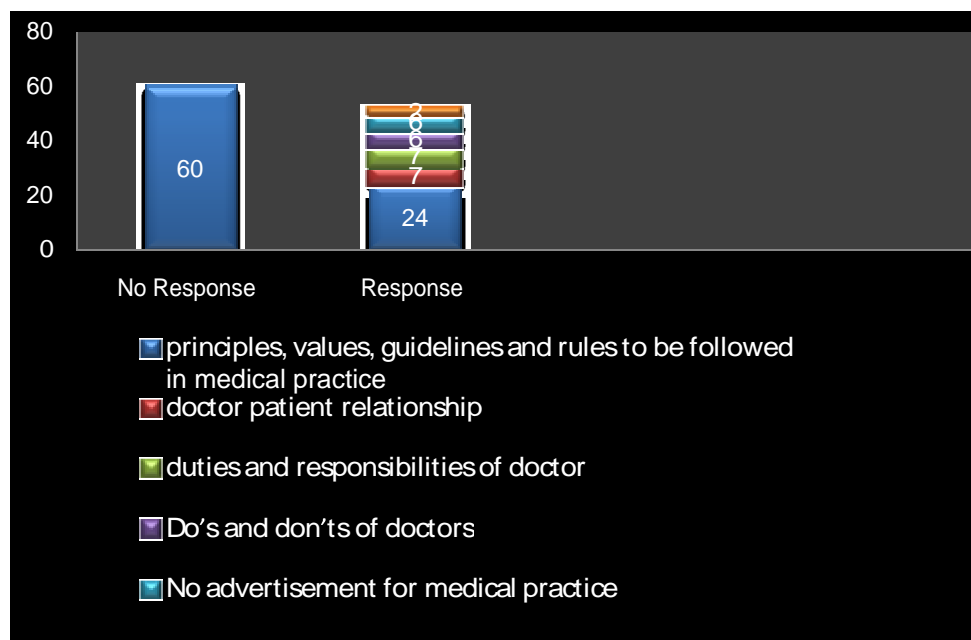


Table.2 Mentioning four bio-ethical principal

Four Bioethical Principle	Frequency	Percentage
one response	1	0.9
> one response	14	12.5
no response	97	86.6
Total	112	100.0

Figure.3 Hippocratic oath by post graduates

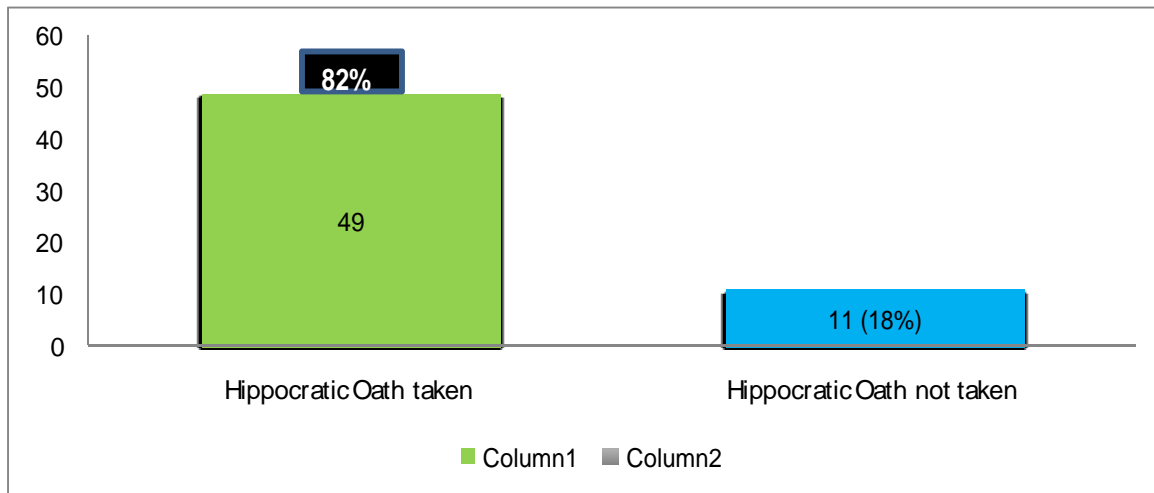


Table.3 Ethical practices followed by self

Ethical practices by self	Number
Honesty by Doctors	14
Respect for colleagues	12
No discrimination/negligence	8
Maintaining confidentiality	8
Right behaviour towards patients	7
Obtaining informed consent	6
Others	5

Table.4 Unethical practice by others

Un Ethical practices by others	Number
Getting bribes/cut/producing false documents	14
Unnecessary investigation/treatment etc	13
Advertising	10
Behavior towards colleagues	8
discrimination/ negligence	6

(88.4%) said that the duration of discussion on medical ethics was less than 5 hours and 44 (56.4%) said that the duration was insufficient. 11(9.8%) of the respondents have attended separate session on medical ethics during their medicine course.

For the question on understanding of the term “Medical Ethics” 60 (53.6%) of them have not responded and 24 (38.5%) respondents described medical ethics as principles, values, guidelines and rules to be followed in medical practice and 7 (13.6%) of them described as doctor patient relationship(Figure - 2). For the question on mentioning four bioethical principles 97(86.6%) not responded and 14 (12.8%) were able to tell more than one principle (Table-2).

Among the postgraduates 49 (82%) of the respondents have informed that they took Hippocratic Oath (Figure-3). Only 39 (69%) of the post graduates were able to mention at least 2 or 3 points in the Hippocratic Oath. For the question on mentioning few ethical practices followed by them 52 (46%) did not responded and others mentioned few practices like “Honesty by Doctors”, “obtaining informed consent” etc (Table-3). For the question on mentioning unethical practices by others 61(54.5%) did not responded and 51 (45%) of them mentioned some of the unethical practices followed by others (Table – 4). In our study 108 (96%) said that knowing medical ethics is important for practice and 100(89%) of them felt the need for a separate session on medical ethics for all health care providers.

In our study 69.6% of the participants said that medical ethics was discussed as a part of subject in medicine curriculum which is almost similar to the study done by

Akoijam Brogen, at all in which 76.5% of them said the same (Akoijam Brogen *et al.*, 2009). In our study 56.4% felt the duration of discussion of medical ethics during medicine course was in sufficient where as 69.2% of the participants felt the same in Akoijam Brogen S, study done in Manipur (Akoijam Brogen *et al.*, 2009). The majority (96%) of the interns and postgraduates felt the importance of medical ethics in the professional life, as in the study done by walrond *et al.*, (2006). In our study 89% them felt the need for a separate session on Medical ethics for all health care providers since medical ethics is not taught in undergraduate level in almost all medical colleges.

The medical ethics and various acts related to medical practice should be emphasized in the medicine under graduate and also in post graduate syllabus and examinations. There is always a continuum between practice and education because a medical career is one of life-long learning. Medical ethics teaching and training should help the doctors at any level whatever may be the discipline to assimilate and conceptualize the basic principles of ethical reasoning (Karuna Ramesh Kumar, 2009). Separate session on medical ethics should be conducted at various stages in the medical education. A final evaluation of the students should also be done before sending them into the society as doctors.

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