

Medical Ethics

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Ethics implies a system of morality, and morality implies seeking out of the correct manner of life a person should lead. It involves doing right things in the proper way, to recognize human rights, dignity and honour, to uphold undeviated strict personal principles, to maintain acceptable image in the society with tolerance, amiable interaction and friendly behavior, to maintain honesty at all times and to remain corruption free at the absolute level.

One can test one's high ethical standards by the following "4 - Ways tests".

One may ask oneself in case of doing or saying something :

- 1) Is it the truth?
- 2) Is it fair to all?
- 3) Is it beneficial to all concerned?
- 4) Will it bring good will and better friendship?

The physicians must do the right thing at the right time. Hippocrates (460-377 BC) formulated medical ethics known as '**Hippocrates Oath**', which underwent various evolution, finally world medical association formulated 'Geneva Code' based on Hippocrates oath which every physician takes at the very outset of his/her career.

This read as :-

- 1) I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the services of humanity.
- 2) I will give my teachers the respect and gratitude which is their due.
- 3) I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity.
- 4) The health of my patient will be my first consideration.
- 5) I will respect secrets which are confided in me.
- 6) I will maintain, by all the means in my power, the honour and the noble tradition of medical profession.
- 7) My colleagues will be my brothers and sisters.
- 8) I will not permit consideration of religion, nationality, race, party politics or social standing to intervene between my duty and my patient.
- 9) I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception.
- 10) Ever under threat I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity.
- 11) And I make these promises solemnly, freely and upon my honour.

Rumi (1207 - 1253) formulated four principles of Biomedical Ethics.

They are :-

- 1) Respect for the autonomy.
- 2) Beneficence.
- 3) Non maleficence.
- 4) Justice.

1) Respect of Autonomy

Basically stands on the concept of individual liberty, particularly with regard to what one does with one's own body or allows to be done to it. Patients or next of kin may accept or refuse any recommended medical treatment in writing.

2) Beneficence

Implies duty to assist patients in need and to secure the well-being by acting positively. It demands that benefit outweighs risk. This refers to acts of mercy, kindness, love and humanity.

3) Non-Maleficence

Involves principle that asserts an obligation not to inflict harm intentionally or to prolong suffering.

4) Justice

Should be distributive with fairness, should be right-based and with respect for morally acceptable laws. Negligence implies that a duty of care exists, that a breach of that duty of care has occurred and that harm has occurred as a result of this. Only perform procedures you are competent to.

Confidentiality

Not to communicate information revealed in the course of treatment to anyone else without consent. Clinicians must not discuss clinical matters with relatives, friends and others unless patient explicitly agrees. It can, however be breached in public interest when it poses a serious threat to health and safety of others. It, of course, should be breached as a result of court order.

The patient has the right to receive information from physicians and to discuss the benefits, risks, costs of appropriate treatment options and alternative course of action. Patient is also entitled to obtain copies or summaries of his medical records, to have his questions answer and to receive independent additional professional opinions.

It is to be realized that information are needed for both doctor and the patient. For doctors to make a diagnosis and to plan management. Patient needs to know and understand. He/She must know to understand and to feel known and understood.

Innovative Treatment

When an innovative treatment is introduced into clinical practice, rigorous testing is mandatory for the protection of individual patients and just use of limited resources.

Strict ethical consideration must be made in times of controversies e.g antenatal screening for congenital malformation, sex determination, abortion, embryo experimentation, cloning, genetic engineering, organ transplantation, selective non treatment, brain death, euthanasia etc.

Physicians shall always maintain the highest conduct of professional standards and participate in CME regularly, shall not permit motives of profit to influence professional judgment, shall be dedicated to providing competent medical services with compassion and respect for the human dignity.

Malpractice includes self advertising, receiving fees solely for referrals and being honorary author in any publication.

Medical practice is largely characterized as unethical because of a tendency of some physicians to procure more money. If a medical practitioner practices with pro-people idealism with commitment to ethical behavior and compassion, I am sure, he shall earn enough for living without taking recourse to malpractice. So go to the basics, ask yourself whether you are discharging your duties properly as a physician and as a teacher. ***CHANGE THE MINDSET, TREAT PATIENTS AS PERSONS:- CHANGE ATTITUDE.***

Today when medicine is rapidly becoming dehumanized, it is becoming more and more necessary that all doctors subscribe to and earnestly and meticulously follow an agreed ethical care system.

A competent patient must be allowed to act as an informed gate keeper of his or her body upon receiving all relevant information regarding his/her ailment.

Life is the most precious thing in the world. Our duty as doctors is crystal clear.

“TO PRESERVE LIFE”