

Knowledge Regarding Consent in Medical Practice among the Para-Clinical Medical Students: A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Consent means free, valid, voluntary agreement, approval, or permission for compliance with some act. Many doctors get involved in medical negligence during professional practice, probably due to a lack of accurate documentation or consent. Para-clinical medical students are at the initial stages of learning about consent. The present study was conducted to assess the knowledge about consent in medical practice among them.

Materials and methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted from September 2022 to December 2022 on 200 para-clinical medical students of Chattagram Maa-O-Shishu Hospital Medical College. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used and data were analyzed by SPSS-V.20.

Results: Among the students, the majority were female (63.5%) and Muslim (83.5%). The age range of the participants was 20–24 years. It was found that 97% of the students had knowledge about the various types of consent in rational medical practice. 73.5% were satisfied with their knowledge about consent in medical practice. 91% believed that written consent was the best type of consent in medical practice. Major participants (89%) believed that only a person over 18 years of age with a sound mind could provide valid consent for general physical examinations and procedures. The majority (88%) felt the need of regular CME on consent. Statistically no association was found with knowledge about consent to gender and phase distribution ($p>0.05$).

Conclusion: This study indicated that the most of the participants were aware of consent and had sufficient knowledge on it. Arranging seminars, workshops and CME would reduce the gap and help in building a constructive attitude toward the necessity of updating knowledge about consent in medical practice.

Key words: Assessment; Consent; knowledge; Medical practice; Medical students.

Introduction

Consent means free, valid, voluntary agreement, approval or permission for compliance of some act. To examine, treat or operate upon a patient without consent is assault in law, even if it is beneficial and done in good

faith. If a doctor fails to give required information to a patient before asking for his consent to a particular operation or treatment, he may be charged for negligence. Not taking consent is considered as a deficiency in medical services.

The medicine being a moral profession, the relationship of doctor and patient entails the highest conceivable degree of trust and fidelity. Good bedside manner, technical competency and communication skills are the physician's behaviors most strongly associated with patient's trust. Informed consent is an essential tool of standard ethical medical practice. It is the process of sharing information with patients which is essential to their ability to make rational choices among multiple options in their perceived best interest.¹ It is universally recognized as an essential safeguard to ensure the preservation of individual's rights.² This is a basic human right to be able to participate in one's own health care decisions. The treating physician's involvement in this process cannot be understated whereas in practice, mostly the "consent signatures" are obtained by a junior doctor or a health worker without any understanding on the part of the vulnerable patient. It is the responsibility of the treating physician(s) to discuss with the patient and obtain consent about the procedure or treatment, how it is carried out, and the risks attached to it.³

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Most likely the current infrastructure in medical institutions in Bangladesh is not sufficient to deal with all the untoward situations. Hence it is necessary to assess the knowledge of the students who are at the initial stages of learning on ethical practice in medical science. In view of this, the present study was conducted to explore the knowledge about consent of para-clinical medical students.

The study aims to assess the para-clinical medical students of a medical college regarding knowledge about consent.

Material and methods

A cross-sectional survey was conducted from September 2022 to December 2022 on 200 para-clinical medical students of Chattagram Maa O Shishu Hospital Medical College. Willingness for participating in the survey is recorded before initiating the questionnaire. They were informed that the questionnaire was the part of study and they were free to accept or deny completing it. A self-administered, structured questionnaire written in English related to the consent was provided to each participant. Received responses were tabulated and statistically analyzed using SPSS software version-20.0. The obtained data were analyzed to evaluate the knowledge about consent.

Results

The current study included a total of 200 responses from medical students of phase II and phase III MBBS course. The number of students were predominantly female (63.5%) and religion were Islam (83.5%). The age range of the participants was from 20-24 years.

Table I Students responses to 17 independent questions on the Knowledge regarding consent in medical practice

Sl. Question	Yes	No	Not Sure
1 Do you know the various types of consent in medical practice & whose consent is valid?	97%	2%	1%
2 Are you satisfied with your knowledge about consent in medical practice?	73.5%	17%	9.5%
3 Are you taking "Written Informed Consent" before any examination or procedure from your patient(s)?	50.5%	46.5%	3%
4 Do you think Informed consent and documentation can prevent a charge of negligence?	93%	5%	2%

Sl. Question	Yes	No	Not Sure
5 Do you think doctor is the best person to obtain consent?	76.5%	10.5%	13%
6 Do you think, written consent is the best type of consent in medical practice?	91%	3.5%	5.5%
7 Do you think treatment can be started for a patient without consent in emergency life-saving situation?	83%	11.5%	5.5%
8 Is only a person above 18 years of age with sound mind can give valid consent for general physical examination and procedures?	89%	10.5%	0.5%
9 Do you think a child above 12 years of age with sound mind can give valid consent for simple, general & physical examination?	54%	41%	5%
10 Do you think consent is required in medico-legal examination?	89.5%	8.5%	2%
11 Informed consent recognizes the capacity and rights of all individual patients to make their own choices and decisions.	99%	0.5%	0.5%
12 The language of consent form should be consistent with the level of understanding of the specific Patient group.	95.5%	2%	2.5%
13 The consent form must be signed (or thumb-impression pasted) by each prospective Patient as evidence of informed consent.	98.5%	1.5%	00%
14 Guardians may give the consent for individual before treating a patient below 18 years of age.	95.5%	3%	1.5%
15 The Patients should be informed about the laboratory test results that influence the immediate outcome/ management of the health related issues.	96.5%	1.5%	2%
16 Adequate time should be given to the Patient to decide if he/she is willing to give consent.	98%	1.5%	0.5%
17 Do you feel CME in Consent in medical practice and laws related to medical practice shall be conducted in regular interval?	88%	2%	10%

It was found that 97% of the students knew the various types of consents in medical practice and whose consent is valuable. It was observed that 73.5% students were satisfied with their knowledge about consent in medical practice. Among study participants, 93% believed informed consent and documentation prevent a charge of negligence. 76.5% students believed doctors as the best person to obtain consent. Most (91%) of students believed written consent as the best type of consent in medical practice. Majority (83%) of doctors believed that treatment could be started to a patient without consent in emergency lifesaving situation. Most of the participants (89%) believed only a person above 18 years of age with sound mind could give valid consent for general physical examination and procedures and 54% believed a child above 12 years of age with sound mind could provide a valid consent for simple and general physical examination while 41% responded no. 89.5% thought that consent was required in medico-legal examination. 95.5% believed that the language of consent form should be consistent with the level of understanding of the specific patient group. 98.5% respondents thought that the consent form must be signed (or thumb-impression pasted) by each prospective patient as evidence of informed consent. Most of the students (96.5%) responded that the patients should be informed about the laboratory test results that influence the immediate outcome/ management of the health related issues. Among study participants, 98% students believed adequate time should be allotted to the patient to decide to give consent. Majority of the doctors (88%) felt that CME on medical ethics, consent in medical practice and laws related to medical practice should be conducted in regular interval.

Table: II Sex and phase distribution of knowledge regarding consent

Group		Yes	No	Not sure	p value
Sex	Male	71	2	0	1.456
	Female	123	2	2	
Phase	Phase II	104	1	0	3.519
	Phase III	90	3	2	

Statistically no association was found with knowledge about consent to gender and phase distribution ($p > 0.05$).

Discussion

When consent is given after knowing all the pros and cons of the act for which the consent is given, then it is termed as informed consent. It is necessary in medico-legal examination, before any surgical operation, before blood transfusion etc. According to the Bangladesh penal code :-

- Section 87 BPC: A person above 18 years of age can give valid consent to suffer any harm that may result from an act not intended to cause death or grievous hurt.
- Section 88 BPC: A person can give consent to suffer any harm that may result from an act not intended to cause death or grievous hurt, done in good faith and for his benefit.
- Sec. 89, B.P.C. A child under 12 years of age and an insane person cannot give valid consent to suffer any harm, which may result from an act done in good faith and for its benefit. The consent of the parent or guardian should be taken. If they refuse, the doctor cannot treat the patient even to save the life.
- Section 90 BPC: Consent is given under fear of injury or due to misunderstanding of a fact is not valid.
- Section 91 BPC: Consent given by an insane or intoxicated person, who is unable to understand the nature and consequences of that act to which he gives the consent, is invalid.
- Section 92 BPC: Any harm caused to a person done in good faith is not an offence, even without that person's consent, if it is impossible for that person to signify consent or has no guardian to obtain consent in time for the thing to be done in benefit.

This study was carried out among 200 phase II and phase III students of Chattagram Maa-O-Shishu Hospital Medical College to appraise their knowledge about consent. It was expected that all the students must be aware of the consent process. It is important that all students must know the actual meaning of valid consent. The valid consent is one which is informed, given voluntarily without any fear or misconception in mind by a person who is eligible for it. In present study, majority of the students (73.5%) were satisfied with their knowledge about consent in medical practice. This is in accordance with the study done by Dash S.K, Yashwanth R and in a study by Rai JJ et al.^{3,4,5}

In this study 50.5% responded that they take informed consent before any examination or procedure, 93% students believed informed consent and documentation can prevent a charge of negligence. But consent is not a defense in case of professional negligence. Among study participants, 76.5% of students believe that doctors are the best person to obtain consent. The similar observations are recorded in the studies carried out by Dash S.K. Rai JJ et al. and Yashwanth R.³⁻⁵ In present study, it was found that 91% respondent believed written consent is the best type of consent in medical practice and 83% believed that treatment could be started to a patient without consent in emergency lifesaving situation. Similar observations were recorded in the studies carried out by Yashwanth R.⁵ If a person is in need of treatment is incapable of giving informed consent, consent must be obtained from next of kin. Order of succession is generally spouse, adult child, parent and sibling. So, it is obvious that if relatives or legal heir are denying for consent in the situation where the patient is in unconscious state, it is not advisable to perform surgery against their refusal. As mentioned by Christian P Selinger that there are several legal exceptions to the right of consent concerning minor, patient with mental illness, patient suffering from communicable disease and incapacitated patient.⁶ In an emergency involving children, when their parents or guardians are not available, consents are taken from person-in-charge, such as provost of the hall, superintendent of asylum, principal of any institute etc. In current study, 89% of students believed only a person above 18 years of age with sound mind could give valid consent for general physical examination and procedures. Among participants, 54% believed a child above 12 years of age with sound mind could give valid consent for simple and general physical examination and 41% responded 'no'. Similar findings were noted by Gupta S et al. Taylor MK, Yashwanth R, and others.^{7,8,5} It can be clearly inferred from section 87-89 of Bangladesh penal code that a child above 12 years of age can give consent for simple and general physical examination which is not associated with any harm to his/her life. In cases where a procedure is associated with harm or may lead to grievous hurt or death, consent of a person above 18 years is mandatory if he or she is in position to give. In this study, 89.5% thought that consent is required in medico-legal examination. Informed consent protects the individual's freedom of choice and respects the individual's autonomy. An individual should take decision to participate without having been subjected to coercion, undue influence or inducement, or intimidation.

In the present study, 99% agreed that informed consent could recognize the capacity and rights of all individuals to make their own choices and decisions. Similar findings were noted by K T Mamuns study where it was 93.8%.⁹ More than 95.5% of the participants agreed that language of consent form should be understandable and 98.5% mentioned that consent must be signed by each prospective participant as evidence of informed consent. Similar findings were noted by K T Mamuns study where it was 90%.⁹

In this study, 95.5% thought that the guardians might give the consent for individual before treating a patient below 18 years of age. Participant students 96.5% agreed that the patients should be informed about the laboratory test results that influenced the immediate outcome/management of the health problem. In K T Mamuns study, it was 71.2%.⁹ 98% students thought that adequate time should be given to the patient to decide. In this study, among study participants, majority of the doctors (88%) felt that CME in medical ethics, consent in medical practice, medical negligence and laws related to medical practice should be conducted in regular interval. This observation is in accordance with other studies.^{10,11}

Conclusion

Many doctors get involved in medical negligence during professional practice, probably due to a lack of accurate documentation or consent. It was observed that most of the participants were aware and had sufficient knowledge about consent, but the law related to consent and other inner details of consent in medical practice were lacking, there is further need to initiate educational events to increase knowledge and awareness.

Recommendation

Faculties or students should be educated by holding seminars, workshops and continuing educational programs. Thus, such initiative would further reduce the gaps of knowledge regarding consent and that may help in building constructive attitude towards necessity of consent in medical practice.

Disclosure

All the authors declared no competing interest.

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