

Medical Ethics

Medical ethics is primarily a field of applied ethics, the study of moral values and judgments as they apply to medicine. Ethics in medicine can be traced in Muslim history by work of Muslim physicians such as Ishaq bin Ali Rahawi (who wrote the *Conduct of a Physician*, the first book dedicated to medical ethics) and Muhammad ibn Zakariya ar-Razi (known as Rhazes in the West).¹

As medical practitioners we all should understand the basic values of medical ethics which include

- Autonomy - the patient has the right to refuse or choose their treatment.
- Beneficence - a practitioner should act in the best interest of the patient.
- Non-maleficence - "first, do no harm".
- Justice - concerns the distribution of scarce health resources, and the decision of who gets what treatment (fairness and equality).
- Dignity - the patient (and the person treating the patient) have the right to dignity.
- Truthfulness and honesty - the concept of informed consent.

Surgical ethics is a sub discipline of ethics and surgery. Surgical ethics directs two major questions to surgeons, surgical trainees and other institutional managers i.e. "What ought the character of Surgeon be? And "What ought the conduct of surgeon be?"²

Since long health care providers have been trying to serve the suffering by extending healing power of their craft being considered as a major decision makers. But in current practice, a clinician should share the right to make decisions with patients and their families; as it is our autonomy which differentiates us from animals.³

Recently in our country, the worsening socioeconomic conditions have made the environment hostile and less tolerant for all professions of public dealing. The same is true for medical profession. Every now and then, we are hearing about violence in health care setup with allegations of either wrong decision making or negligence. In my opinion, our basic mistake is that we give too much importance to beneficence, forgetting

the importance of autonomy although it is still a controversy world over. Tassano⁴ has questioned the idea that beneficence might in some cases have priority over autonomy. He argues that violations of autonomy more often reflect the interests of the state or of the supplier group than those of the patient.

Here the importance of informed consent comes. Explaining the pros and cons of every treatment option will save us from a lot of hassles and also provide the patient a command over making their own choices.

Ethics ensures good professional practice. Ethics teaching has been shown to have a profound influence on medical professionals' attitude.^{5,6}

Nowadays, importance of medical ethics have been well understood and institutions all over the world have developed guidelines for ethics in clinical teaching and surgical residency programmes^{7,8,9}. Unfortunately in Pakistan, despite of all odds, still very limited efforts have been made to enhance knowledge and awareness about medical ethics. We have to understand the importance of medical ethics in modern medical practice and play our role in imparting this knowledge to all healthcare professionals in order to ensure quality healthcare services.

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