

Ethical Viewpoint Paper

Ethics In Radiology

Khalid Ahmad¹

¹Head/Founder Bioethics UNESCO, Nodal Unit-Afghanistan, Director of International Relationship, Mirwais Neeka Institute of Higher Education, Kandahar, Afghanistan and Honorary Physician at Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mumbai.

Corresponding Author: Khalid Ahmad

E-mail: drkhahmad@gmail.com

Introduction

The term medical ethics was first coined in the year 1803 by an English author and physician Thomas Percival where the roles and duties of doctors within the medical field are published. With changing time, changes were made in the code of medical ethics.

Basic Ethical Principles

Autonomy: It is a person's self-reliance, independence, liberty, rights, privacy, freedom. It is the right of a patient to refuse or choose their treatment. A patient has a full right to make decision regarding health care.

Beneficence: Being kind, doing good work and charity. Health care provider should develop skills and knowledge, get trained with any new research or development in their required field so that they should act in the best interest of the patient.

Non-maleficence: The doctor should not be the cause of harm to the patient or the society, and they should promote good. • Justice- Treatments should be made available equally to everyone.

Veracity: Duty to tell the truth, and avoid deception except special, or exceptional cases.

Fidelity: Strict observance of duties and faithfulness to others.

Sources of Ethics

- Science
- Culture
- Religion
- Experience
- History

Ethics is derived from Greek word *ethos* meaning custom, habit, character, or disposition. It is the system or code of conduct and morals advocated by an individual or group or the study of acceptable conducts and moral judgement. Biomedical ethics is the branch of ethics dealing with dilemmas faced by medical professionals, patients and their families and friends.

A code of ethics presents a framework for a systematic examination of beliefs that may lead to an understanding of personal and professional morality and responsibility.

In a medical profession, the relationship which a patient shares with the doctor is the core part of the health care system, and it forms an important foundation of medical ethics. But unfortunately, this relationship is becoming weaker with each passing day and so often these days we see and read in newspapers that doctors are beaten by patients relative and the working environment for a doctor, which should be safe becomes scary. It becomes difficult for doctors to effectively treat the patient in such working condition where they are threatened for their own safety. Thus, it becomes

necessary on part of both the doctor and patient to come together and work towards maintaining a healthy relationship in the following ways:

1. The doctors should try to establish a good rapport with the patient, as this will develop trust on the doctor and the patient will give complete and important information about his illness during history taking, which will help in accurate diagnosis and better treatment of the patient and it will save time and resources.
2. The doctors in this technologically advanced age, must give sufficient time for each patient, to understand them and their illness, be kind and compassionate towards them, it will automatically allow the patient to confide on the doctor.
3. The doctor should provide all the information and options which the patient and the family members should know, take consent whenever required, take opinion from colleagues when needed for the betterment of patient's health. It is observed that a patient can receive best care by the doctor and health care system, if they work ethically.

Ethics between Doctor's Relationships

As a person in medical field, we are taught a lot of subjects dealing with diagnosis and treatment of the patient, but the basic code of conduct how we as a doctor should behave with each other is hardly given due importance. Dr. F. Udawadia, stated that "good teaching, though concentrating on essentials, must question dogma, must arouse and encourage an attitude of enquiry and thirst of knowledge and serve as a stimulus for further study. Above all, teaching must be imbued with an ethical slant." A doctor must always be a student, so they must learn from each other be it a senior or junior, because teaching can mold your minds with knowledge and experience. Lately we have heard of the shocking news of a young doctor committing suicide at workplace became the highlight everywhere. Doctors of today are beaten to death, live in overcrowded and filthy rooms, long working hours with insufficient sleep, underpaid and overworked. How many more doctors we have to lose before we start taking mental health and workplace harassment seriously and work towards it. These are creamy layer of the society who sacrificed a lot, fought all odds to survive the long duration of under-graduation, hectic internship, post-graduation, and super specialization, and yet after all these years of struggle they chose to end their lives where they know how precious a life is. So yes, doctors are not weak, they have endured a lot of struggles and patience.

We, doctors have been trained to give the best treatment to our patients but we are not giving our best behaviour to our colleagues. We leave our home and loved ones, some change city, some states, some even change their country to become a good doctor. We make hospitals our home, so why can't our colleagues and fellow residents and seniors become our family and support us and guide us whenever needed. I feel in such situation even though we are working non-stop, but we can be at mental ease with no pressure of seniors. Seriously, there was a time this profession was considered best and noble and people had high regard for them some even considered doctors as God. But these days doctors are not even considered human, people are losing their trusts on doctors gradually. This is a very sad phase in our profession and we should do as a whole medical community to safeguard our profession, and bring the respect and trust back to our profession before it is too late.

Professional Ethics

Professional ethics deals with "rightness and wrongness" of an act or behaviour as compared with natural reasons. Professional behaviour is defined by professional standards of conduct and scope of practice in their respective field.

Why is Ethics Important for the Radiologist ?

A Radiologist has to focus on the image which is behind the patient rather than spending time directly interacting with the patient like the other physicians. As the primary reader of medical images, a radiologist provide advice which are meant for the well-being of the patient, but the main role of the radiologist is informing about these results to the physician for providing the best care

to the patient. A radiologist when receives a request from another physician to perform an imaging study or perform a procedure on the patient, he becomes a part of the patient's medical team. Thus, being a member of the team involving in the treatment of the patient is crucial as accurate imaging and diagnosis depends on the radiologist.

Radiology is a specialized and one of the important branches of medicine where imaging technologies are used to diagnose and treat patients. Just like doctors from other specialization, the radiologists can also be liable to claims of malpractice caused due to diagnostic errors. With the development and advancement of technology, the role of a radiologist in the clinical management is increasing, so is the importance of radiological intervention in patient management. A radiologist is known as "Doctor's doctor" because a physician refers the patient to a radiologist for final diagnosis and confirmation. Thus, medical ethics should be considered an important part in the field of radiology and must be a part of training for the residents which can further help in patient management.

In order to safeguard the health of the patient at accurate time and help other medical professional by correct and timely diagnosis, we should establish a strong medical ethics through continuous education and self-practice. Radiologists should get involved where ever necessary with the patient to guide and give options in difficult decision making about the health care. Ethics in radiology and in medical profession will have a great impact on the patient and health care system in the long run.

The Role of A Radiologist as a Consultant

Whenever an imaging study is advised, a radiologist must ask whether exposure to radiation is necessary. Unnecessary imaging should be avoided, where the physician can treat the patient based on the clinical sign and symptoms and come to a diagnosis. It should not be done for financial gain, as the treatment itself is not affordable for majority of the population, especially people residing in the developing country like India. When the outcome will not change the treatment plan, imaging should be avoided.

The radiologist and the concerned physician should discuss the patient's condition and decide whether imaging is useful or can be harmful for the patient in certain situations.

Many a times physicians order inappropriate or potentially harmful studies for many reasons varying from the urgency to emergency, all the physicians not always have knowledge about imaging or have incomplete understanding of radiation exposure and its risk to vulnerable group such as pregnant women and children. In such cases the radiologist should discuss the case with the physician.

Basic Ethical Principles for a Radiologist

- A radiologist must conduct themselves in a professional manner, respond to the patient and support colleagues and help in providing ethical and quality patient care.
- A radiologist should avoid unnecessary radiological tests and radiation exposures.
- Good quality and updated radiological imaging machine and modalities which will directly decrease exposure to radiation.
- A radiologist must deliver patient care and services without any discrimination on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, or socioeconomical status.
- A radiologist assesses situations, exercise care, discipline, and judgement, assures responsibility for professional decisions, and must act in the best interest of the patient.
- A radiologist must always take consent and explain procedures to be performed properly in a language understood by the patient.
- A radiologist must perform procedures according to the accepted standard of practice and demonstrate expertise in minimizing radiation exposure to the patient, self, and the working staffs.
- A radiologist must always practice ethical conduct appropriate to the profession and protect the patient's right to quality and a good radiological care.

- A radiologist must respect the confidence entrusted, respect the right to privacy by the patient and reveals confidential information only when required by law or to protect the welfare of the individual or the society.
- During examining a female patient, a male radiologist must make sure that the examination is carried out in presence of a female attendant.
- A radiologist must always continue to improve knowledge and skills by participating in educational and professional activities, attend conference to know the new changes and research in the field of radiology and get updated with new radiological techniques and studies. Must maintain a good relationship with each other and with other medical professionals.

Ethical Dilemma

All professional decisions in radiological technology and other health care practices involve a consideration of human values. Unethical behaviour that is clearly wrong, can be defined as ethical outrage. Ethical dilemmas occur when the correct choice is not clear and personal values may conflict, thus ethical dilemmas require ethical analysis.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is purposeful, self-regulatory judgement that results in the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. It allows imaging professionals to perform the following;

- Interpret and analyze ethical models and theories.
- Evaluate application of these models and theory to any given situation.
- Plan an appropriate course of action.

PNDT Act 1994

Pre-Conceptional and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 is an act formed by the Parliament of India in order to prevent female feticides and declining sex ratio. This act also banned pre-natal sex determination. It was noted that in the early 1990, ultrasound techniques were used very commonly used in India. Indian family have a tendency of preferring male child over a female child, discrimination against women lead to usage to this ultrasound technique for there benefits in sex selection abortion. This harmful practice was reflected in the Indian census as the sex ratio was seen declining.

Provision in this act are as follow-

- This act prohibits sex selection, before or after conception.
- The pre-natal diagnostic techniques like amniocentesis and ultrasound can in used for detection of the following:
 1. Genetic and Chromosomal abnormalities
 2. Metabolic and Sex-linked disorders
 3. Congenital malformations
 4. Haemoglobinopathies
- The Radiologist should not perform ultrasound for the determination of sex of the fetus.
- The Radiologist should not communicate the sex of the fetus to the mother or family members by words, signs, or any other method.
- A copy of PCPNDT registration certificate and a booklet must be displayed in the waiting room and USG room.
- Form F must be completely filled with signed consent of the patient and the performing radiologist, and this form must be preserved at the clinic and online as well.
- Report must be submitted on the 5th of every month and all records need to maintain for a minimum period of 2 years.
- If any person advertises for pre-natal and pre-conceptional sex determination facilities in form of any notice, article, documents, advertisement through media or print, can be imprisoned for three years and fined Rs.10,000.
- The PNDT Act has made it mandatory registration of all the diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling and laboratory centers and ultrasound clinics.

How to avoid Ethical Conflicts

- Understand the right thing to do in the right situations.
- Educate yourself and research professional standards of conduct and ethical principles as a guide.
- In certain situations, they are unavoidable, be respectful and rightful.

Conclusions

Ethics have become an important part for a radiologist today. In India, a radiologist must be cautious of radiological malpractice and PCPNDT Act. It is very important to have a basic information and knowledge about ethical issues so as to prevent oneself from professional liability in future. Professional ethics is specific to an occupation and defined by members of the profession at many levels. Ethical dilemma naturally occurs and requires thorough analysis. Medical professionals must possess a keen sense of the role that the human values can play in resolving ethical dilemmas that arises in professional practice, both in dealing with patients and other health professionals.

Acknowledgements – Nil

Source of Funding – Nil

Conflict of Interest – Nil