

Innovative Course on Moral Values, Bioethics, Professionalism and Personal Well Being in Undergraduate Medical Curriculum – A Futuristic Approach: Reflections of Undergraduate Medical Students

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Bioethics – The untold component of successful medical practice and research

Bioethics is the soul of virtuous clinical practice and research. As the healthcare field is evolving and advancing, it is essential to focus on fairness, equity and moral thinking across several medical fields. An ethical dilemma happens in a decision making circumstance where the medical practitioners face a situation to infringe their ethical merits. A profound understanding of the bioethical principles will aid in analyzing the consequences of every possible option leading to righteous decision making. Bioethics education and its application in clinical medicine is the dire need of the hour with the medical fraternity suffering the loss of patients trust and faith on them. Massive technological breakthroughs in the healthcare field together with strained doctor – patient relationship emphasizes the implementation of bioethics into the medical curriculum. Increasing cases of violence and brutality against medical professionals is a cause of concern across the globe but the root cause for this remains undiscovered. Lack of effective communication and unsatisfied patient's needs are the major ethical concerns. Also paucity of effective ethically governed grievance addressing system complicates the existing crisis. To overcome all these tribulations and to offer morally bound medical assistance in the forthcoming years upscaling the undergraduate bioethical knowledge becomes imperative.

The curricular innovation

A well conceptualized, meticulously planned and rigorously implemented curriculum is crucial to the success of any professional course. A modern unprecedented curriculum was designed by National Medical Commission of India which included bioethics as a component of the AETCOM (Attitude, ethics and communication) module [1]. This module aimed to offer a holistic view of the healthcare profession to the students. The curriculum was formulated with scrupulous attention, organizing them into competencies, verifying its incorporation and evaluating its outcomes via formative and summative assessments.

Panimalar Medical College Hospital & Research Institute has always been keen on providing exceptional standards of education to the students. In an attempt to implement the newly revised curriculum comprehensively and effectively, the Medical Education Unit & the Bioethics Unit of the Panimalar Medical College Hospital & Research Institute in association with the Department of Education, International Chair In Bioethics, conceptualised and launched the unique, first of its kind yearlong “Foundation course on moral values, bioethics, professionalism & personal well-being” as beyond the campus training initiative in year 1 as beyond the campus training initiative and continues across all the professional years until IIIrd Professional Part-2..

Fostering medical ethics beyond the borders

Ever since its establishment in the year 2001, the UNESCO chair in bioethics has been working towards building a robust international network of units in academic institutions for disseminating ethics education. Currently the chair consists of more than 218 units across 77 countries [2]. The chair is actively involved in a multitude of activities including organising international conferences, local, national and international seminars and courses, International teacher's forum, and formulating curriculum for bioethics. The Department of Education, International chair in bioethics intends to lay the foundation of ethical standards among medical students and strengthen medical ethics among various healthcare sectors.

Ethically competent healthcare professionals in making

Panimalar Medical College Hospital & Research Institute aims to deliver quality healthcare services with high ethical standards. They have always been pioneers in adopting curricular updates and innovations that benefit students to greatest possible extent. It has a well established bioethics unit in collaboration with Department of Education, International Chair in Bioethics. The bioethics unit is actively functioning, including weekly seminars for the undergraduate medical students and international conferences on account of International Bioethics day. The painstaking efforts of the bioethics unit led to the formulation of a methodical curriculum which ensured that bioethics education was imparted all through the four and half years of medical education course.

The undergraduate medical students were offered an year long "Foundation course on moral values, bioethics, professionalism & personal well-being". Distinguished speakers from across the globe present enriching sessions before the students and give deep insights about various concepts of bioethics and the forum opens up for in-depth discussions on ethical issues and dilemmas in the healthcare settings.

We discerned profound changes in our moral and ethical behaviour ensuing a year long international bioethics course. The eye opening sessions by expert faculties exposed us to all sorts of ethical conundrums that we could encounter in our clinical practice or in clinical postings during the undergraduate professional years and provided finest solutions for them. The sessions took a different path from conventional didactic teaching. We were never addressed as students but co – learners. The interactive lectures were never concluded without the question & answer segment. The speakers were exceedingly interested in hearing our comments, views and thoughts. This helped us appreciate the perspectives and viewpoints of our fellow colleagues and view a problem from different angles. After the successful completion of bioethics foundation course in the first professional year, our analytical and critical thinking skills have been revamped. It has encouraged us to be more of thinkers and a better listener which improves the doctor – patient communication and interaction with fellow colleagues more effective.

Ethics play a pronounced role in decision making during clinical practice. In the world of ever growing medical advancements and digitalisation nothing is more gratifying than caring for patients under stress by sharing optimistic interactions, making them comfortable and fearless. With this prior exposure to bioethics, we were able to critically appraise the ethical behaviour of clinicians. Knowledge of established guidelines and application of these ethical principles in research has paved way for a more appropriate and rectitude approach. Deep insights on concepts like autonomy, equality, justice, equitable sharing of resources, maximizing benefit, less harm, human dignity and human rights, ethical transgressions, individual responsibility, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, solidarity, co-operation and social responsibility in context of healthcare and research, non-discrimination and non-stigmatisation, respect for human vulnerability and personal integrity, respect for cultural diversity and pluralism in healthcare delivery were provided.

Drafted in an attempt to produce ethically qualified healthcare professionals, this course has been a source of light illuminating the importance ethical conduct in medical field. This novel course has produced an ineffaceable impact on the progress of our career. It has made a deep rooted

impression in our mind that ethically sound behaviour is the crux of healthcare profession. We perceive a sense of empowerment to make headway in our professional journey.

Conclusion

Public concerns regarding moral behaviour of physicians have become universal extending from miscommunications, to breaching of ethical practices for personal benefits. Bioethics education should be reinforced and intensified into a vigorous bioethics training programme. Despite the assiduous efforts of Medical council in replacing the conventional classroom teaching with more vivid and crucial components like ethics many medical universities are yet to effectively introduce the same. An extensive implementation of these novel revisions in curriculum will enhance the ethical standards of healthcare services provided and pave the way for fruitful doctor – patient relationship in the years to come.

REFERENCES

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2. <https://ifmsa.org/unesco-chair-in-bioethics>

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