

Evaluation of the Views of Externs, Interns, Assistants, and Clinical Faculty Members on Clinical Professional Ethics

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Education and observance of the principles of professional ethics in the clinical fields of medicine are always considered as important. The purpose of this study was to determine the views of trainees, interns and clinical assistants on the importance of observing clinical professional ethics.

Methods: This is a descriptive cross-sectional study. The statistical population of the study included all trainees, interns, clinical assistants and clinical faculty members of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences in 2017-18, out of whom (380 people) 320 were selected by available sampling method. The questions were identified in five areas: conscientiousness, respect for others, career excellence, honor and honesty, and altruism. T-test and ANOVA were used to analyze the quantitative data and chi-square test was used for analyzing the qualitative variables. In this study, all ethical considerations have been observed and no conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Results: 320 participants took part in the present study (84%), out of whom 163 (50.9%) were female. Their mean age was 26.8 ± 6.4 . With regard to their frequency distribution, 128 (40%) were externs, 127 (39.7%) were interns, 51 (17.5%) were assistants and 9 (2.8%) were professors. 84.1% of the participants considered avoiding the use of derogatory sentences towards patients as an important option in clinical professional ethics. Men and women did not differ in their views on the importance of moral statements ($P < 0.844$). The views of externs, interns, residents and professors on the importance of ethical codes were significantly different ($P < 0.035$).

Conclusion: From the perspective of clinical participants, some items such as respect for patients were more important but were less important in the field of job excellence. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen internal motivation and emphasize the position of clinical professional ethics indicators in medical training programs for some insignificant reported items.



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Summary

Background and Objective

Ethics has a prominent place in the religion of Islam. The great Prophet of Islam stated that the

purpose of his Besat (being sent as a prophet) was the excellence of ethics and morality. Adhering to professional ethics in caring for and treatment of distressed people in hospitals is a human and sacred necessity and is professionally very important. Professional clinical ethics means

knowing and acting on the ethical responsibilities that each person has toward others (1, 2).

Hippocratic oaths and ancient Persian medical texts have always emphasized the principles of respect for patients and observing their rights, the principle of confidentiality, and order. The need for observing the ethical considerations has been also emphasized by the great Iranian physicians and sages such as Bu'aliSina, Ali bin Rabbi, Ahwazi and AghiliKhorasani. Medical practitioners have consistently focused on the development of clinical medical sciences and the development of professional ethics from time immemorial (3-5). Considering the importance of the position of medical students and medical professors in caring for and treatment of patients, the purpose of this study was to determine the viewpoints of trainees and interns and clinical assistants on the importance of observing professional clinical ethics.

Methods

Compliance with ethical guidelines: All participants were assured that their personal information and viewpoints would remain confidential and only the general opinions would be extracted in the form of a scientific article. The participants completed the data collection form with full consent by self-administration.

This study is a cross-sectional descriptive study. The statistical population of the study included all trainees, interns, clinical assistants and clinical faculty members of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences in 2017-2018.

Inclusion criteria for clinical faculty members included having at least 6 months of educational and clinical activity as well as full consent. The questionnaire used for data collection consisted of two parts: demographic information and the main part, which sought the participants' view on the importance of observing clinical ethics. The second part consisted of 53 items based on a review of the literature and comments of 5 faculty members of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and guidelines for adherence to clinical professional behavior indicators of residents and interns and medical trainees of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education of Iran. Each question was set on a scale of 1 (indicating not important) to 6 (indicating very important). Based on the mathematical logic of these scores in the five categories, scores between 53 and 106 were interpreted as considering professional ethics as of very low importance, the scores from 106 to 159 were interpreted as considering professional ethics

as of low importance and those between 159 and 213 were considered as giving medium importance, those ranging from 213 to 267 were interpreted as regarding professional ethics as important and, finally, the scores from 267 to 318 were interpreted as regarding the ethics as very important. The questions were divided into five areas of conscientiousness, respect for others, career excellence, honor and integrity, and altruism. T-test and ANOVA were used to analyze quantitative data and chi-square test was used for qualitative variables.

Results

Out of the 380 questionnaires distributed among the research participants, 320 (84.2%) completed and returned the questionnaires, out of whom 163 (50.9%) were female and 157 (49.1%) were male. The sample population consisted of 128 (40%) interns, 127 (39.7%) interns, 51 (17.5%) assistants, and 9 professors (2.8%). 84.1% of participants indicated that using humiliating sentences is the most important option in clinical professional ethics. The morning report on professional ethics was of the least importance. Externs, Interns, Residents, and Professors had a significant difference regarding the extent to which they considered ethical codes as important ($P<0.035$). In the field of job excellence, assistants also placed more value and importance on the other groups, and 83.9% of them mentioned the importance of this area ($P<0.3$). However, there was no significant difference between the clinical groups in the areas of altruism ($P=0.597$), honesty and integrity ($P=0.348$), and respect for others ($P=0.078$). 61.6% of clinical participants described the components of professional ethics as clinically important. There was a significant difference in the mean scores related to professional ethics among externs, interns, residents, and faculty members ($P<0/008$). The results of our study revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female participants' perceptions of professional clinical ethics.

Conclusion

The mean score related the importance of clinical professional ethics indicators according to the completed self-administered questionnaire was 252.4 ± 27.7 out of 318 points. The results of this study showed the importance of not using derogatory words towards patients and their companions and respect for colleagues and care and treatment team in the clinical field, respect for patient privacy and also making a great effort to

perform reassuring behaviors, being honest with patients and colleagues and obtaining informed consent from patients were more important in treatment and care procedures. The least important was related to the morning report on professional ethics, and participation in training for lower level learners. In their report, Vasheghani et al. concluded that the promotion of professional and occupational competence and the confidentiality index are more important than other indicators (4). In the present study, this index also showed great importance. It seems that in the previous studies, the findings related to the need for continuous evaluation of professional clinical ethics and planning for teaching professional ethics in the clinic according to the hidden curriculum and attention to love, human dignity, responsibility, scientific promotion of the index considered in professional ethics were clinically consistent with the results of the present study. Therefore, strengthening internal motivations and expressing the position of professional clinical ethics indicators in formal clinical and curriculum programs is recommended for cases that are mentioned as less important.

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Ethical considerations

According to the authors, this article has been extracted from a thesis in General Medicine by Hossein Hajizadeh, approved by the Research Council of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences (code 9554) and approved under the ethical code IR.MAZUMS.REC.1396.10384.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest in this study.

Authors' contribution

All authors were equally involved in designing and arranging the study and statistical analysis.

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