

Ethical Criteria in Medical Profession

Adil Hamidvand¹ , Kazem Moazedi^{1*} , Seyed Ali Enjoo² 

1- Department of Islamic Education, School of Medicine, Ardabil University of Medical Sciences, Ardabil, Iran.

2- Medical Ethics Department, School of Traditional Medicine, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

*Correspondence should be addressed to Mr. Kazem Moazedi; Email: kmaa1341@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Ethics are defined by the resolute trait of the soul or by other regarding as appropriate and inappropriate behavior in dealing with others. Professional ethics include the behavior, practice and courtesy of a person while doing business and respecting people's rights in the profession, emphasizing behaviors such as transparency, or predictability. As a sensitive and busy profession, medicine can be one of the most important careers in applied ethics. In the present study, with the aim of identifying important domains in professional ethics, we reviewed the studies related to ethics in medicine as a profession.

Methods: This is a review study of ethical indices with the keywords 'medical', 'ethical', and 'professional' and their Persian equivalents in national and international sources and data bases. About 150 studies and investigations in the field of professional ethics in medicine were extracted. The Subjects in the same studies were categorized and examined after being thematically filtered. The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Results: Responsibility toward patient, medical research ethics, medical confidentiality, commitment to social justice, sufficient expertise, respect for others, time management, medical ethics and its relevance to financial issues, professional integrity, and the Islamic biomedical ethics are among the most important domains in professional ethics in medicine.

Conclusion: Considering the results and the importance of medical profession, ethical recommendations can provide a relaxed, stress-free environment for work, increase productivity in treatment and medical research, and provide a clear direction for people's behavioral frameworks in the clinical field.

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Summary

Background and Objective

Medical ethics could consider as a branch of applied ethics discussed behaviors and professional norms (1). According to studies, 12 criteria have been proposed for ethical behavior in the professional field, including integrity, accuracy, predictability, credibility, education, accountability, freedom, giving opportunity,

mutual respect, efficiency, and respect for the rights of research subjects (2, 3). In the present study, we examine important ethical characteristics in medical professional ethics, and explain the most important behavioral characteristics improve the relationship between physicians and their patients.

Methods

This is a review study of the ethical indices with the keywords 'medical', 'ethical' and

‘professional’ in Persian and their English equivalents in national and international sources and data bases, including the specialized database of Noor journals, the Persian academic journals’ database (SID), the comprehensive humanities portal, MAGIRAN, Google Scholar, PubMed and Scopus. Initially, about 150 review and investigational studies were found in Persian and English languages in the field of professional medical ethics. The journals were then classified based on the topics covered in similar studies and then thematically refined.

Results

Important professional ethical characteristics

Responsibility for patients

Social responsibility is an important issue in management, the study of which requires the recognition and study of various variables (4). Observance of professional ethics increases the ability of organizations to create organizational commitment, responsibility and loyalty of employees and to reduce the society and organization costs (5, 6).

Having sufficient expertise and no harm

Considering the errors that sometimes occur in the medical system, professional medical ethics estimates that having sufficient expertise is one of the important features in this field. Specialization will not only help to improve the treatment processes and increase their efficiency, but will also lead to better education and training of specialist physicians (7, 8).

Respect for others and respect for others’ autonomy

Physicians, as individuals who are often confronted with people from all social classes, are exposed to challenges that may sometimes make them ignore respect for others and their dignity. Human dignity requires that everyone, whether as a physician or as a patient, be respected and not be disrespected (9).

Commitment to social justice

From a practical point of view, in the medical sciences, justice regardless the different definitions could represent in the allocation of services that the patient deserves, and to have or not to have priority settings and criteria to prevent oppression of the patient or people involved in the system (10).

Justice and ethics in medical education

Unethical behaviors in medical education-related considerations such as how to take the test, how to deal with cheating on the test, discrimination in students’ admission, students’ ethical assessment, monetary criteria and an easier entrance test to

accept some wealthy students and stricter scientific criteria for the admission of poor students and ethical considerations related to dissertations are important areas of ethics in medical education (11-15).

Providing adequate diagnostic and therapeutic information and involving the patients to participate to make their medical decisions

One of the signs of respecting the patient and observing the morals in relation to her/him is that we do not make her/him suffer from ignorance about her/his illness and the feeling that the situation is not under control (16).

Medical research ethics, confidentiality and privacy

Research ethics guide and conduct researchers to see the patients as persons deserve human dignity not as means of their studies. Patients’ personal information and privacy are fully respected in all researches on human data and material (12). Before, during and after research, all kinds of ethical considerations related to the observance of human rights, specially the rights of vulnerable participants, the fetus, and even human tissues and data, as well as animals, are necessary (14).

Medical research publication ethics

Professionals must avoid all types of poor scientific conducts and academic dishonesties; including plagiarism, data fabrication, data falsification, or other types of fraud (17).

Time Management

From the point of view of time management, the classification of tasks includes important and immediate tasks, important but not immediate tasks, immediate but insignificant tasks, insignificant and non-immediate tasks, and useless and time-consuming tasks (18).

Patients’ rights

In general, personal care, respect for beliefs and values, and the right to know, and participate in decision-making are among the basic rights of patients. Respecting to these rights by physicians is essential to make trust that is crucial for relationship between the physicians and their patients (19, 20).

The doctor-patient relationship

60 to 80 percent of cases that lead to the diagnosis of the disease are based on information obtained from an interview with the patient (21). Proper communication between physician and patient and the establishment of an emotional and moral relationship can lead to increased patient compliance with the physician (22).

Financial ethical issues

Disclosure is one of the important parts of informed consent. One of the best approaches to manage conflict of interests also is disclosure. Informed consent and conflict of interests are the two main ethical issues in sharing income in the medical profession. Commitment, honesty, trustworthiness and loyalty to the patient are among the ethics that the physician should adhere to without compromising the patient's interests (5).

The medical professional integrity and the Islamic culture's approach to professional medical ethics

The “Shafi” is one of the divine attributes, which means the Healer, from the divine point of view, does something that is a manifestation of this attribute of God (23). It shows the sanctity of the medical profession.

Conclusion

In the present study, the domains of professional ethics in medicine were briefly reviewed and important aspects of its characteristics were mentioned. The results related to responsibility towards patients are consistent with the study by Fazeli *et al.* (6) and the results of the theoretical study by Tavakoli *et al.* confirm the findings of the present study on social justice (24). Providing sufficient information and involving the patients in diagnostic and therapeutic decisions in the clinical field, observing professional ethics in medical research, adhering to the confidentiality and privacy in the field of medical research and observing ethics in publishing the results are other important characteristics that the study by Shahin Taqi explains (25). According to a study by Medlana *et al.*, the management skills required for physicians, both in personal life and in the workplace, including time management, have attracted the attention of a number of physicians participating in the study (26). In the study of Khaghani Zadeh *et al.*, the foundations of anthropology and value studies are considered as a description of Islamic medical ethics (23). The authors of this article believe that in medical ethics research, while reviewing the traditional view of medical ethics, one should have a closer look at the history of Iranian-Islamic civilization and provide the ground for a fundamental change in this field by taking a new approach and considering the latest scientific and biomedical achievements in the field of medical ethics relying on the principles of Islamic ethics.

According to the results of this study, the four

principles of biomedical ethics and the role of spirituality in observing patient rights and the integrity and sanctity that exists in the medical profession, along with behaviors derived from Iranian Islamic culture, form the main discussion about the approach of the Islamic culture in professional ethics in medicine.

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Authors' contribution

Collecting, reviewing and selecting materials and writing the article: First and third authors; Designing the study and monitoring its implementation and the corresponding author: Second author.

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