



IMPORTANCE OF MEDICAL ETHICS PHILOSOPHY AND NECESSITY OF MEDICAL ETHICS TEACHING

Khosrow Sharifi¹, Mansooreh Hoghooghi² and Hanon sadoni^{3*}

¹Department Of Cardiac Surgery, Atherosclerosis Research Center, Golestan Hospital, Ahvaz Jundishapur University Of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran

²Department of Hematology, Medical Oncology, School of Medicine, Dezful University of Medical Sciences, Dezful, Iran

³Department of Orthopedic Surgery, Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences (AJUMS), Ahvaz, Iran

Received for publication: January 17, 2015; Revised: January 19, 2015; Accepted: February 21, 2015

Abstract: Medical ethics is an interdisciplinary knowledge which deals with the ethical and value aspects of medical profession and medical sciences. Although medical ethics has a history of 2500 years, it has been formally included in medical training courses in most of medical sciences universities of the world since 30 years ago and quickly became a common part of curriculum for medical students. In fact, extensive advances in medical care and medical knowledge and also recent social changes have caused ethics to be raised as an essential part of today's medical education. Despite extensive research on the curriculum of medical ethics and several useful reviews and revisions, still many questions about the nature, objectives, and results of these courses have remained unanswered. This has led to the negligence of many of the qualities, skills, and abilities that should be included in the curriculum of medical ethics. Studies have shown that some of the courses offered as medical ethics in the curriculum have not managed to help physicians to improve their ethical skills.

Key Words: Medical ethics, Teaching, Interdisciplinary Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Medical ethics philosophy is part of medical ethics which tries to use philosophical analyses to explain the right and the wrong in practical field of various subjects and medical health care. Traditional medical ethics was mainly based on the thoughts and ideas of eminent philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle [1,2]. They had learned ethics with medical sciences, which was defined as taking care of ego and the art of living. At the time, Hippocratic was the first one who developed a famous oath, in which ethical principles were blended into medicine. In fact, Hippocratic's oath constitutes a moral undertaking for texts and applying ethical principles of medical profession [3]. Religious teachings have also had an irreplaceable role in the formation of medical ethics in human societies.

Islam and Islamic scholars, especially in the flourishing period of Islamic civilization, have always paid a special attention to ethics in medicine and this is well evident in the treatises and books written by scholars at that era. One of the most valuable manuscripts of this period is the medical letter of advice written by Ali bin Al-Majusi Ahwazi which is more comprehensive than Hippocratic's Oath [4,5]. However, with the emergence of various theories in the field of ethics philosophy, medical ethics was also influenced. The most influential philosophical schools in this area included Kantian task-based school, profit-based ethics school, and virtue-based ethics school [6].

Making practical decisions in medical ethics is typically requires a clear understanding of the relevant

philosophical issues. Hence, detailed explanation of principles and foundations of determining the good and evil in medical ethics seems to be an undeniable necessity. To make ethical debates useful and applicable, appropriate criteria for understanding, practice, and decision-making in a way that people who believe in ethics acknowledge it. In western countries, four key principles are now being proposed and used to guide ethical decision-making which include individual authority, usefulness, non-harmfulness, and justice [7-9]. This theory is one of the most common hypotheses in medical ethics which is used for resolving the ethical problems and issues [10].

Since Islam has propose more comprehensive and sometimes different views from the western culture in each of the four principles mentioned above, determination of a specific framework for ethical decision-making in medicine for Muslim physicians finds a special important. This is the important duty of Shite philosophers, ethics scholars, jurists, and medical scientists to study and review the various issues and debates raised and develop a comprehensive, acceptable, and common framework in Islamic communities. Medical ethics education for physicians is one of the most important educational needs in medicine which has evolved over the recent decades. Undoubtedly, medical education alone is not enough for strengthening and developing the moral competencies necessary for a good doctor. The need for medical ethics education for physicians and health care staff is widely and increasingly felt and it seems now is the right time for proper placement of medical

*Corresponding Author:

Dr. Hanon Sadoni,

Assistant Professor of Orthopedic Surgery,

Department of Orthopedic Surgery,

Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences (Ajums),

Ahvaz, Iran.



ethics in medical curriculum. Today, in many countries at all levels of medical education, including general, specialized, and even retraining courses, medical ethics is taught through new approaches.

The present paper aims to comprehensively identify and discuss different approaches to medical ethics training in the world, describe the procedure of medical ethics training in Iran, and finally propose practical recommendations for promoting this process. Due to the high interdependence between culture and medical ethics, the Islamic beliefs and behaviors of people and medical staff must be taken into account in this regard.

NECESSITY OF MEDICAL ETHICS TEACHING

With the increasing number of ethical problems in recent years, promotion of professional ethics among medical students has found a special importance [11]. The increasing number of ethical problems is due to several reasons, one of which is that physicians are faced with new tools and medical devices without appropriate social guidelines for their use, such as new assisted reproductive techniques [12]. In addition, after graduation, students exhibit certain professional beliefs and behaviors, reducing their ethical sensitivity somewhat and making the ethical decision-making difficult for them [13]. Although the physicians who show unethical behaviors account for a minority of all physicians, just one mistake or misconduct cause the trust and confidence of people in physicians to be lost [14]. Hence, the need for committed physicians who are aware of how dealing with tough ethical cases has been one of the main driving forces of change in the education of medical ethics.

CURRENT STATUS OF MEDICAL ETHICS TEACHING

Given the rapid advances in life sciences and medicine, the classical medical ethics was firstly raised about 40 years ago. Due to the presence of religious and spiritual values and great importance of human dignity and value, the classical medical ethics training has been taken into consideration in Iran in recent years. Currently, in all universities of Medical Sciences, medical ethics course is taught to students in the apprenticeship. The purpose of this course is to make students familiar with generalities and various schools of thought in medical ethics, how to communicate with colleagues, patients, and judicial authorities, liability and medical malpractice, euthanasia, brain death and organ transplantation, conscious consent for abortion treatment, moral aspects of sexual issues, and ethics in research [15, 18].

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Medical ethics is an interdisciplinary knowledge which deals with the ethical and value aspects of medical profession and medical sciences [19]. Although medical ethics has a history of 2500 years, it has been formally included in medical training courses in most of medical sciences universities of the world since 30 years ago and quickly became a common part of curriculum for medical students. In fact, extensive advances in medical care and medical knowledge and also recent social changes have caused ethics to be raised as an essential part of today's medical education [20,21]. Despite extensive research on the curriculum of medical ethics and several useful reviews and revisions, still many questions about the nature, objectives, and results of these courses have remained unanswered. This has led to the negligence of many of the qualities, skills, and abilities that should be included in the curriculum of medical ethics [22]. Studies have shown that some of the courses offered as medical ethics in the curriculum have not managed to help physicians to improve their ethical skills [23]. The present study findings indicate that identity of medical ethics courses in Iranian universities is not based on cultural foundations, values, and beliefs of Iranian society. Also, there are many challenges and weaknesses in this regard that should be seriously addressed in order to develop and promotion of medical ethics. Fathi asserts that any curriculum is based on cultural and social realities and contexts which form the identity of that curriculum. Therefore, understanding the identity of a curriculum requires studying and interpretation of issues producing that curriculum. Another finding of this study reveals that there is a secular approach to medical ethics curriculum in Iranian universities. In this regard, Sashadina (24) states that the medical ethics that is currently taught in our universities is not sufficient and most Farsi books published on this subject have mimicked western medical ethics which is different from the philosophical foundations and values of Iran. Hassani believes that although there are relatively extensive backgrounds in ethics in scientific, philosophical, and religious texts of Iran, they have been avoided to be expanded and promoted for many reasons. Sashadina says, "After years of teaching medical life ethics in Islamic societies, I have come to the conclusion that wrong translation or modeling from western medical life ethics for application in medical and health care institutions of Muslims would be fruitless without preliminary studies on culture sources and indigenous epistemology." In fact, the objective of the existing medical ethics course is to deny and reject the indigenous and Islamic identity, denude students of what belongs to them, and renew their identity based on secular insights and thoughts, because the results of this study indicate

that what is taught in Iran as medical ethics mainly is not based on needs and cultural and social issues of Iran. About the negative effects of this issue, Yepinazar & Mergoliz (25) studied the effect of west medical ethics training on the culture and language of the Muslim students in UAE and stated that despite the existence of rich Islamic teachings about moralities, there is little tendency for inclusion of these teachings in medical ethics course in medical sciences universities in the Persian Gulf countries and medical ethics curriculum is presented based on the foreign models and in English, without any analysis of Islamic medical ethics. Therefore, students will learn the ethical issues that are intertwined with western culture and this can change their understanding of their own society's culture. In addition, lack of a clear model for addressing the arising issues in the Islamic medical ethics is another finding of this study. Sashadina (24) states that Islamic jurisprudence is the deduction of juridical ordinances that merely deals with the permission or prohibition of certain medical processes or procedures. However, it is necessary to determine the moral principles of an action before prescribing or prohibiting it. Juridical entities have evaded the responsibility of regulating the ethical values and justifications for understanding the complex ethical issues that health care professionals, patients, and their families are facing with. Additionally, there are few juridical decrees on ethical justifications and guiding people to show ethical conducts in the face of newly-emerged medical issues. Today, ethical issues require careful exercise of rational argument based on accepted principles and values of a society in order to achieve a realistic solution (24-30).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Authors acknowledge the support by Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran

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Cite this article as:

Khosrow Sharifi, Mansooreh Hoghooghi and Hanon sadoni, Importance Of Medical Ethics Philosophy And Necessity Of Medical Ethics Teaching, International Journal of Bioassays, 2015, 4 (03), 3753-3756.

Source of support: Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran

Conflict of interest: None Declared