

## Original Article

# AIIMS Follow up on Medical Ethics; RTI Act Provided Rescue

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## ABSTRACT

The Medical Council of India makes it necessary to write the name and registration number of the medical practitioner on all the documents they issue. The doctors' at the most prestigious institute of the country, AIIMS, New Delhi has forgotten these ethical guidelines and the premier institute is not bothered to make a check to implement these guidelines. The current study takes advantage of the RTI Act, 2005 to learn about the attitude of management towards the implementation of medical ethics and trying to make a change in the policies for the betterment of the medical fraternity and the country at large.

**Keywords:** AIIMS, Medical Ethics, Registration number, Right to Information Act

## INTRODUCTION

Medical ethics keeps an important place in today's society when the medical fraternity is facing a lot of criticism throughout the country. The news of torching hospital property and hitting on medical fraternity can be seen in media every other day <sup>[1]</sup>. The medical fraternity especially the doctors and hospital administrators should be aware of the ethical standards laid down by the statutory bodies and should abide by them. One of the important aspects of medical ethics is the identity given to the registered medical practitioners by the medical council in the form of a registration number that separates them from quacks. It is mandatory to write the registration number of the medical practitioner on all the documents they issue including the prescription papers, bills, receipts,

medical certificates, etc. as per IMC Act and Drugs Act 1945 <sup>[2,3]</sup>. We have shown previously that the premier institute of the country All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi was not following the guidelines to write the name and the registration number as per the guidelines. We could bring a change in implementing the said guidelines by filing an RTI application and making it mandatory to write the registration number <sup>[4]</sup>.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study is a follow up of our previous work done to analyze the implementation of writing the name and registration number on the prescription papers. We collected the prescription papers, bills, and reports from

the patients who have been consulted at AIIMS, New Delhi and analyzed them for the name and registration number of the doctor. Based on our analysis, we sent an email along with necessary documents to the Director, Dean, and registrar of the AIIMS, New Delhi requesting them to take the necessary action. A reminder was sent after 15 days of the initial email before filling an online RTI to the Central Public Information Officer (CPIO) of the AIIMS after one month of the first email. The RTI pertains to questions related to the grievances related to medical ethics. The first appeal and then the second appeal was filled as per the regulations laid down under the RTI Act, 2005 due to non-satisfactory response. The hearing of the second appeal was held after two years of filling of the RTI application [5].

## RESULTS

A total of 20 prescriptions were collected along with 4 bills and 1 lab report. Table 1 explains the details of different types of documents mentioning the name of the medical practitioner on them. It was interesting to note that none of the documents mentioned the registration number of the medical practitioner. Only 1 prescription paper mentioned the name of the doctor on the label pasted on the prescription paper, 14 prescription papers mentioned the department or Unit (1 or 2) and 5 follow-up prescriptions did not have any label. 2 bills mentioned the name of the doctor while other 2 bills only mentioned the unit number of the respective department. 1 lab report mentioned the name of the doctor.

The CPIO forwarded the RTI application to the CPIO of the establishment section, legal section, and computer section of the AIIMS. The CPIO of the computer section forwarded the application to the CPIO of the Director

office after filling the first appeal. The establishment section replied after one month that it does not pertain to them. The CPIO of the legal section forwarded the application to the CPIO of the academic section, examination section and Grievance section of the institute. The academic section forwarded the application to the CPIO of the Hospital Administration.

An email was received from the establishment section one day prior to the scheduled hearing before the Hon'ble Central Information Commission compiling the data from the several CPIOs (Table 2).

## DISCUSSION

The study raises several questions regarding the implementation of medical ethics at the premier institute of the country. The study along with our previous work emphasizes the need for opting for legal action to make a mandatory change in the implementation of medical ethics as the institute did not reply to our letters or emails.

The different departments or sections of the institute are not well versed with the regulations related to medical ethics as seen by frequently forwarding of the application to different departments. The institute does have a PG portal to receive the grievances but there is no specific committee to handle such grievances as revealed in Point 3 of Table 2.

Point 4 of Table 2 reveals that the grievances are addressed within one month or as early as possible but the present study did not receive a satisfactory reply in 2 years.

In our study, only 5% of the prescriptions had the name of the doctor on the registration number and none of the prescription papers had registration numbers. A study was done amongst the MBBS students of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year at a teaching hospital in Manipal revealed 74%, 64%, and 67% respectively had the knowledge of writing registration numbers on the prescription paper. (6) Another study done in Pondicherry revealed 74.6% of medical students had knowledge about the writing of registration numbers on the prescription [7].

**Table 1: Details regarding the mention of the name of the documents of AIIMS**

Document	Total	Name mentioned
Prescription paper	20	1 (5%)
Bills	4	2 (50%)
Reports	1	1 (100%)

**Table 2: Details of the information received from CPIO, AIIMS**

S. No.	Information sought	Information sought
1.	Is there any protocol to reply to grievances received from the public through email or letter	Grievances received through the PG portal as well as Director Office are sent to the concerned Department of AIIMS for comments/reply. The reply is sent to the applicant by Grievance Cell on the basis of information received from the concerned Department through e-mail or letter depending on the mode of communication of the applicant.
2.	Is there any committee who handles grievances received from the public	No, there is no committee that handles grievances.
3.	What is the time duration in which grievances received are to be addressed?	Within one month and as early as possible.
4.	When was above-said grievance said by me through e-mail was discussed amongst the grievance committee. Please provide minutes of the meeting of the same	Not received in Grievance Cell.
5.	What decision was taken by the grievance committee in this regard	Not received in Grievance Cell.
6.	Is there any provision to write the registration number of the doctor on all the documents they issue in the issue? Has any check been made on the same regarding not following the guidelines?	As per the MCI Act, all doctors should mention their registration number wherever it is pertinent. No mechanism is in place to check whether this is followed or not.
7.	What action has been taken by the Institute regarding the implementation of medical ethics with respect to the writing of registration numbers? Was any circular/memorandum was issued by the institute to its staff regarding the implementation of medical ethics. Kindly provide a copy of the same	A circular was issued in 2009 in this regard (Copy enclosed). This was for All Doctors who are working in the AIIMS. All Doctors who are working in the Institute at the time of their joining are asked to submit a copy of their registration with the Medical Council of India/Delhi Medical Council/States of Medical Council and the copy of registration certificate is a concerned establishment.No information is available regarding any circular/memorandum issued by the institute to its staff regarding implementation of medical ethics
8.	Is any CME/Workshop been organized by institute regarding the implementation of Medical Ethics amongst medical fraternity? Kindly provide details of all such academic activities.	There is no information available if any CME/Workshop been organized by institute regarding the implementation of Medical EthicsMedical Ethics is part of the curriculum of MBBS Course and all doctors are taught about the same and are expected to know the same.
9.	How many cases or grievances have been received by your office regarding non- implementation of medical ethics? If any cases have been registered, what was the punishment is given in that case.	So far as Grievance cell of this Institute is concerned no case or grievances have been received regarding the non-implementation of medical ethics.

The institute did not have any mechanism to check whether the ethical standards are followed or not. Also, they had no information about the organizing of any CME/ Workshop regarding the implementation of medical ethics. However, a study done in Bahrain has shown that there is a significant benefit from a structured curriculum in biomedical ethics resulting in more ethical and moral concepts [8]. Sudha Ramalingam *et al.* have shown the efficacy of workshops for faculty and postgraduate students to improve the ethical behavior [9]. The courses on medical ethics are lacking in the country and currently, they are only taught during preclinical years of the medical school.

## CONCLUSION

The study helps in deciphering the current practice of medical ethics in regard to the writing of the name and registration number at the premier institute of the country. The Right to Information Act is utilized in the implementation of medical ethics. It is imperative to follow medical ethics at the premier institute and it should hold workshops or CMEs frequently to reeducate the faculty and students regarding the implementation of the same and routinely make a check for its implementation. Similar studies are needed from other institutions to implement the practice of medical ethics in the country.

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