

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Assessment of Knowledge and Awareness in Handling the Medicolegal Cases among the Interns in a Tertiary Care Hospital - A Questionnaire based study

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Abstract :

In the near past, doctors are considered God by the patients but, in this era, doctors are threatened by patients by increasing trends of complaints & litigations against doctors. The doctors should have knowledge and awareness in handling medicolegal cases to minimize faults & litigations. Hence it is necessary to evaluate knowledge and awareness in handling medicolegal cases among budding doctors. The present study was conducted to assess the knowledge and awareness in handling Medicolegal cases among the Interns. Methods: This was a questionnaire based study carried out at Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Kaher. A predesigned self-structured multiple-choice questionnaire containing 21 questions was framed based on knowledge and awareness and was prepared in Google forms and sent to 116 Interns who were posted in various departments after obtaining informed consent. The results obtained in the study showed that the interns had enough knowledge about consent, inquest, and MCCD and also had enough awareness of the Consumer protection act, 2019 and issuing injury certificates but the interns lagged some knowledge in certain IPC sections, lagged awareness in maintaining MLC records and also lagged confidence in handling the medicolegal cases independently. Overall knowledge of medicolegal cases among our interns is better compared to peers but needs to be enhanced to promote knowledge and to avoid medical negligence in their future practice.

Keywords : Medicolegal case; Interns; Knowledge; Awareness; Medical negligence.

Introduction :

Every profession has several obligations and responsibilities. As the medical profession is unique and different from other professions the need for scientific knowledge, technical skills, and understanding of patient health & care is necessary.¹ In the present era, the general public is aware of the legal rights and more accessibility and availability of the electronic content, hence doctors should be updated with the knowledge in this field.² Recently medical care has come under the purview of the Consumer protection act, of 2019. The responsibilities of doctors have increased and it is mandatory to have thorough and updated knowledge of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology.³ The trainee period is critically important for acquiring the knowledge & in-handling the medicolegal cases and ethical reasoning.⁴ Medical negligence is a concern, though no doctor wishes to harm their patient. Today, those involved in saving other's life find themselves at risk because of increasing rates of assaults or litigations on medical professionals.⁵ Proper documentation of Medico legal case (MLC) is very important to avoid litigations during medical practice. Doctors face a lot of challenges involving medico-legal issues in their day-to-day practice. Hence the present study is aimed to assess the knowledge and awareness

in handling medico-legal cases among Interns in a tertiary care hospital.

Materials and Methods :

This Questionnaire study was carried out at Jawaharlal Nehru medical college, Kaher after obtaining Institutional ethical clearance. A predesigned self-structured multiple-choice questionnaire containing 21 questions was framed about the knowledge and awareness in handling the MLCs and were prepared in the Google forms and sent to all the interns who were posted in various departments, among which 116 volunteering Interns were included in the study after obtaining informed consent. Responses were collected and analyzed and percentages were calculated.

Results :

It was observed from Table 1, that 88.8% of the interns answered correctly that informed written consent is the best consent, whereas 21.2% of the interns answered incorrectly. Totally 70.7% of the interns answered correctly that Sec. 174 CrPC denotes police inquest and only 29.3% of the interns answered incorrectly. Only 40.5% of the interns answered correctly that MLC records should be stored for a minimum of 10 years and 59.5% of the interns answered incorrectly. Among questions related to knowledge of IPC sections, 50.9% of the interns answered correctly that Section 44 IPC denotes Simple hurt, & remaining 49.1% of interns answered incorrectly. 85.3% of interns answered correctly that Sec. 320 IPC denotes Grievous injury & remaining 14.7% of interns answered incorrectly. 69.8% of interns answered correctly that the punishment of murder denotes Sec. 302 IPC, & remaining 30.1% of interns answered

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incorrectly. 46.6% of interns answered correctly that Section 304-A IPC denotes death by rash & negligent act and 53.4% of interns answered incorrectly. 69% of the interns answered correctly that 18 years is the minimum age of consent in major procedures according to section 87 IPC & 31% of interns answered incorrectly. The majority of the interns, around 83.6% answered correctly that MCCD will be issued by a treating physician and only 16.4% answered incorrectly. Only 29.3% of interns answered correctly that municipality will issue a death certificate and the remaining 70.7% answered incorrectly.

It was observed from Table 2, that 95.7% of the interns were aware of the medicolegal case and only 4.3% of interns were unaware. Totally 69.8% of the interns were aware of their responsibilities while handling MLC and only 30.2% of interns were unaware of it. Most of the interns around 89.7% were aware of inquest and only 10.3% of the interns were unaware of the inquest. Almost 57.8% of the interns were aware of the duties of the CMO in case of unknown poisoning and 42.2% of the interns were unaware. A total of 60.3% of the interns were aware that a case can be filed against a suicide attempt victim, whereas the remaining interns were unaware of it. Most of the interns, around 73.3% were aware of how to prepare an injury certificate, whereas 26.7% of the interns were unaware of it. Most of the interns,

Table 1: Percentage of interns having knowledge in handling the MLCs.

Sl. No	Questions	Correct response
1	Which is the best type of consent in MLC?	88.8 %
2	What does Section 174 CrPC denote?	70.7
3	For how many years hospital is legally bound to maintain the MLC records?	40.5%
4	What does Section 44 IPC denote?	50.9%
5	What does Section 320 IPC denote?	85.3%
6	Do you know the IPC section for the punishment of Murder?	69.8%
7	What does section 304A IPC denote?	46.6%
8	What is the minimum age of consent in major procedures according to section 87 of IPC?	69%
9	Who should issue medical certification of cause of death (MCCD)?	83.6%
10	Who should issue a death certificate?	29.3%

Table 2: Percentage of interns having awareness in handling the MLCs.

11	Do you know what is MLC?	Yes (95.7 %)
12	Do you know your responsibilities while handling MLC?	Yes (69.8 %)
13	Do you know about inquest?	Yes (89.7 %)
14	Do you know the duties of a casualty medical officer in case of unknown poisoning?	Yes (57.8 %)
15	Can police able to file a case on suicide attempt victims? If not why?	Yes (60.3 %)
16	Do you know how to give an injury certificate?	Yes (73.3 %)
17	Do you know which cases require a medicolegal autopsy?	Yes (81.9%)
18	Do you know the procedure for recording a dying declaration?	Yes (70.7%)
19	Are you aware of The Consumer protection act 2019?	Yes (70.7%)
20	Can you handle MLC independently?	No (76.7%)
21	Do you think that the present UG teaching is sufficient to know about medicolegal responsibilities?	No (59.5%)

Annexure :

Sl. No	Questions	Response
Knowledge-based Questions		
1	Which is the best type of consent in MLC?	A) Implied B) Express C) Informed oral D) Informed written
2	What does Section 174 CrPC denote?	A) Police inquest B) Magistrate inquest
3	For how many years hospital is legally bound to maintain the MLC records?	A) 3 years B) 5 years C) 7 years D) 10 years
4	What does Section 44 IPC denote?	A) Hurt B) Grievous hurt C) Definition of injury
5	What does Section 320 IPC denote?	A) Simple hurt B) Grievous hurt
6	Do you know the IPC section for the punishment of Murder?	A) 302 B) 301 C) 300 D) 299
7	What does section 304A IPC denote?	A) Dowry death B) Death by Rash and Negligent Act C) Murder D) Culpable homicide
8	What is the minimum age of consent in major procedures according to section 87 of IPC?	A) 16 B) 12 C) 18 D) 20
9	Who should issue medical certification of cause of death (MCCD)?	A) Police B) Government C) Treating physician D) Court
10	Who should issue a death certificate?	A) Police B) Treating Doctor C) Court D) Municipality E) Government
Awareness based Questions		
11	Do you know what is MLC?	Yes/No
12	Do you know your responsibilities while handling MLC?	Yes/No
13	Do you know about inquest?	Yes/No
14	Do you know the duties of a casualty medical officer in case of unknown poisoning?	Yes/No
15	Can police able to file a case on suicide attempt victims? If not why?	Yes/No
16	Do you know how to give an injury certificate?	Yes/No
17	Do you know which cases require a medicolegal autopsy?	Yes/No
18	Do you know the procedure for recording a dying declaration?	Yes/No
19	Are you aware of The Consumer protection act 2019?	Yes/No
20	Can you handle MLC independently?	Yes/No
21	Do you think that the present UG teaching is sufficient to know about medicolegal responsibilities?	Yes/No

around 81.9% were aware of which all cases require a medicolegal autopsy, and the remaining 18.1% of interns were unaware of it. Most of the interns, around 70.7% were aware of the procedure for recording a dying declaration, and 29.3% of interns were not aware of it. Similarly, 70.7% of interns were aware of the Consumer protection act, 2019, and 29.3% of interns were not aware of the consumer protection act, 2019. Only 23.3 % of the interns answered that they can handle MLCs independently whereas most of them, about 76.7% answered that they cannot handle MLC independently. The majority of the interns, about 59.5% answered that the present UG teaching is sufficient to know about medicolegal responsibilities but 40.5% of the interns answered that the present UG teaching is not sufficient.

Discussion :

The present study was carried out on 116 voluntarily selected interns of Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Kaher. The study showed that interns were more aware of the questions related to consent, documentary evidence, CMO duties, inquest, and Dying declaration, COPRA, 2019. They were least aware of the questions related to the handling of MLC cases, medical record-keeping, Death certificates and sections related to Rash and negligence and injury definition.

A similar study was conducted by Jambure, et al. in the year 2017, to assess the awareness and knowledge about medico legal issues among interns and post graduate students, they found that only 53% of the interns were aware of the responsibilities in handling MLC whereas the present study showed the result to be 69.8% for the same. Which states that our interns were more aware of the responsibilities in handling MLC comparatively.⁵

A similar study was conducted by Rai JJ et al., in the year 2013 to assess the knowledge and awareness of medical law and ethics among interns and residents, they found that almost 90% of the respondents were aware of informed consent which is in concordance with the present study which showed the result to be 88.8%.⁶

A similar study was conducted by Giri PA et al., in the year 2010, to assess the knowledge about medicolegal problems among interns and residents from a rural tertiary care teaching hospital in Western Maharashtra – In a cross-sectional study, they found that 61% of their interns were unaware about how to issue an injury certificate whereas in the present study 73.3% of our interns were aware on issuing injury certificate.⁷

Conclusion :

This present study was an endeavor to assess the knowledge and awareness in handling medicolegal cases among interns. As there is increased use of the internet, electronic and print media there is an increase in awareness among the public about the ethical conduct of medical practitioners. Hence there are more cases against doctors, which is an issue of immediate concern to the medical fraternity. To minimize such assaults, doctors need to be acquainted themselves with laws and regulations that concern their practice. This will result in the fulfilment of ethical, moral, and legal obligations in their duties.⁸

Keeping in view of the present study the interns had enough

knowledge about consent, inquest, and MCCD and also had enough awareness of the Consumer protection act, 2019 and issuing injury certificates but the interns lagged some knowledge in certain IPC sections, lagged awareness in maintaining MLC records and also lagged confidence in handling the medicolegal cases independently. This implies that the curriculum has improved but also needs to be enhanced to promote knowledge and to avoid medical negligence in their future practice.

Recommendations:

Based on the observations in our study, we recommend the following suggestions to enhance the knowledge and confidence in handling medicolegal cases:

- a) Students should be posted in casualty postings under forensic medicine department supervision periodically from MBBS professional year II which will enhance their confidence in handling medicolegal cases independently.
- b) Interns should have compulsory postings in the mortuary to observe and conduct post-mortem cases and acquire knowledge on acts and laws related to medical practice.
- c) The knowledge of MLC can also be increased by conducting periodic online zoom meetings on various medicolegal issues by the dept. of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology.
- d) Interns are encouraged to attend regular CMEs and workshops on medicolegal issues to increase awareness and to update their knowledge on current medicolegal issues in the medical practice.

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Ethical Clearance: The study was conducted after obtaining institutional ethical clearance

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