

ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG DENTAL STUDENTS REGARDING 'ETHICS IN DENTISTRY'-A QUESTIONNAIRE BASED STUDY.

TYPE OF MANUSCRIPT: Questionnaire based Study

RUNNING TITLE: Knowledge of Ethics in dentistry among dental students

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ABSTRACT

Ethics comes from the Greek word meaning 'ethos' originally meaning character or conduct. It is typically used interchangeably with the word moral which is derived from the Latin word 'mores', which means customs or habits. Together these two terms refer to conduct, character, and motivations involved in moral acts. Ethics is defined as a branch of philosophy concerned with the study of those concepts that are used to evaluate human activities, in particular the concept of goodness and obligation. It is a generic term referring to the moral code of conduct in a civil society and the rules, customs and beliefs of that society. Dentistry, being one of the healing professions, has an obligation to society that its members will stick on to high ethical standards of conduct. The purpose of dental ethics is to heighten ethical and professional responsibility, promote ethical conduct and professionalism in the field of dentistry. It also advances the dialogue on ethical issues, and stimulate further reflection on common ethical problems in dental practice. This study assesses the knowledge among dental students (undergraduates) in dental ethics.

Keywords: *Ethics, conduct, knowledge, undergraduates*

INTRODUCTION

Dental Ethics can be defined as the moral duties and obligations of dentist toward his patients, professional colleagues and to the society. Dental ethics applies more principles and virtues to the practice of dentistry.. Ethics is an integral part of dental sciences due to its scope in education, preventive, therapeutic, cosmetic clinical situations and dental practice. Dental

students dilemma in clinical decision-making needs to be further analysed by providing them with varying clinical situations (1).

There are five fundamental principles that form the foundation of the ADA Code. The principles of ethics are: To do good, to do no harm, autonomy, justice, truthfulness. (2) **BENEFICENCE** (“do good”): This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to act for the benefit of others and the dentist’s primary obligation is service to the patient and the public-at-large. **NONMALEFICENCE** (“do no harm”): This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to protect the patient from harm. **PATIENT AUTONOMY** (“self governance) This concept expresses that professionals have a duty to treat the patient according to the patient’s desires, within the bounds of accepted treatment, and to protect the patient’s confidentiality. **JUSTICE** (“fairness”): This principle expresses the concept that the dental profession should actively seek allies throughout society on specific activities that will help improve access to care for all. **VERACITY** (“truthfulness”): Under this principle, the dentist’s primary obligations include respecting the position of trust inherent in the dentist-patient relationship, communicating truthfully and without deception, and maintaining intellectual integrity. There are very few medical colleges in India with a standardized ethics curriculum, and with provisions for evaluation [2]. The dental curriculum makes merely a passing mention of the principles of ethics [3].

In current daily practice, medical specialists and the dentists come across common ethical issues. The core issues in medical ethics are the ethics of the doctor–patient relationship, patient's confidentiality, and the need to obtain informed consent, whereas bioethics deals with all-encompassing moral issues in medicine and biomedical sciences [4,5]. Following ethical standards is crucially important because it protects the medical practice against unscrupulous use of specialized and privileged knowledge which has been obtained in an attempt to offer real benefits to suffering people[6,7]. A study done by Hannah et al, showed awareness on the ethics and Scope of Dental Photography among undergraduate dental Students where 62% of the participants are aware of a course called dental photography and 34% have already attended a course in dental photography.[8] Another study done by Parvathi et al evaluated the knowledge attitude and practice toward preventive dental care among dental professionals in Chennai.[9]

These applications improve the status of the dental practice as well as the quality of work and services. Health-care professionals must have the basic knowledge of theories, principles of bioethics and skills for ethical decision-making [10]. Health-care professionals including dentists must provide comprehensive care for patients but patients still may express dissatisfaction over the services provided to them this could be because of the poor ethical conduct practiced [11]. Dental curriculum makes merely a passing mention of the principles of ethics [12,13] There is no comprehensively utilized gold standard with respect to ethics teaching in the health sciences [14].

The aim of this study is to ensure that the students have adequate knowledge about an ethical practice and hence to enhance their ethical value systems and adherence to code of ethics. This study will also intend undergraduates to understand the importance of ethical values and ethical

dilemmas experienced during their clinical training thereby exploring the current status of training in ethics and need for revision of future curriculum.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was taken out on 60 students, 20 students in each category as preclinical, clinical and interns of Saveetha Dental College and Hospitals, Chennai India. The questionnaire was designed brief and easy for the students who agreed to fill in the questionnaire. Prior approval and permission was obtained from the guide and respective faculties of the department. In order to assess the knowledge of ethics in dentistry, the questionnaire consisted of 3 sections where the first set of questions was regarding the individual's self-awareness in dental field. The second set, was assessing their level of knowledge in ethics and this section consisted only about 2 questions-a fill in the blank type question. This is where the students were asked if they knew what dental ethics were and if their answer was yes, they were asked to define dental ethics and the code of dental ethics and finally regarding their attitude in dentistry. This particular section included about 8 set of questions with choice selection response, yes/no and don't know. This study is conducted among the dental students to assess their knowledge in ethics in dentistry among three different categories of students in each of the following:

- A) Pre-Clinical
- B) Clinical
- C) Interns

RESULTS

Among the 60 dental students-22 were male and 38 were female. The preclinical students were in the age group of 17-19 years followed by clinical students who fall in the age group of 19-21 years and interns between 20 to 25 years had participated in completing the survey. The mean value is taken as 10 for calculating the data's.

In fig-[1] Self awareness among the students under

i] Pre-Clinical-5.3 ii] Clinical-6.0 iii] Interns-6.6

In Fig-[2] Knowledge among the students under

i] Pre-Clinical-2.6 ii] Clinical-3.6 iii] Interns-6.6

In fig-[3] Attitude among the students under

i] Pre-Clinical-5.75 ii] Clinical-6.5 iii] Interns-7.0

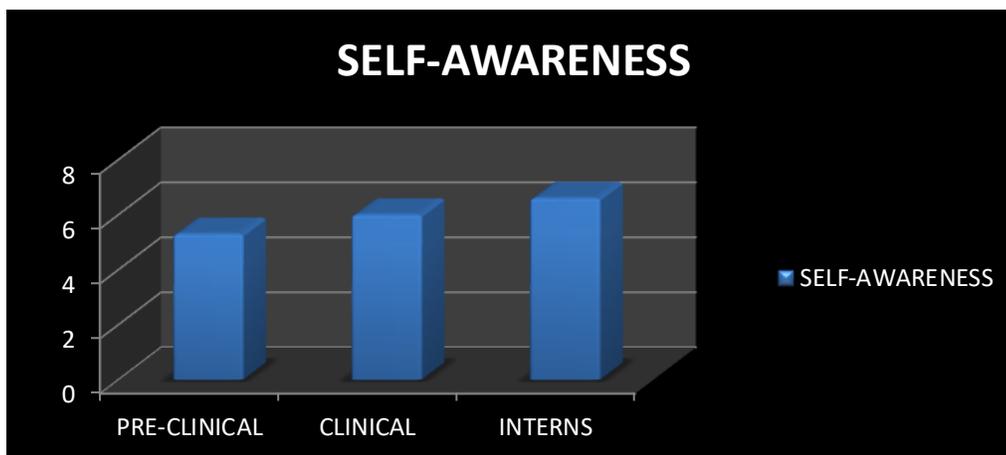


Fig-[1] Self-Awareness among dental students

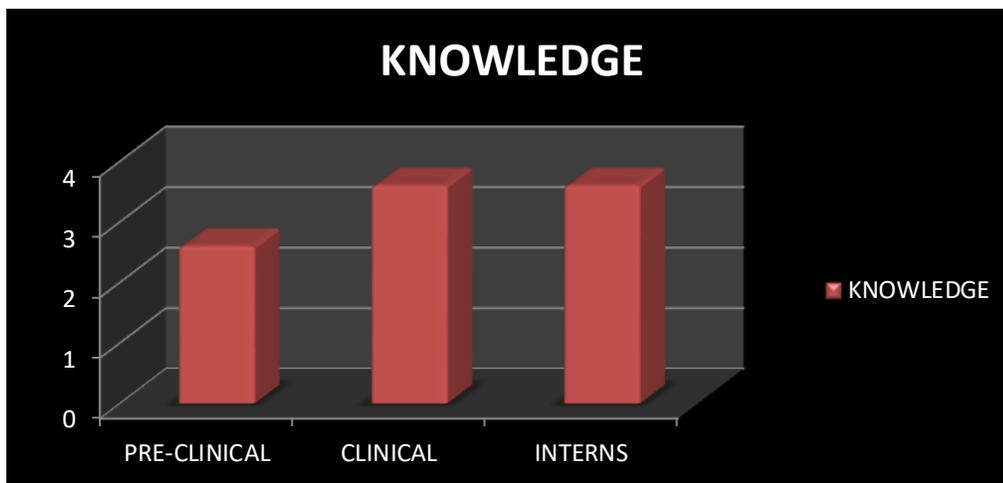


Fig-[2] Knowledge among dental students.

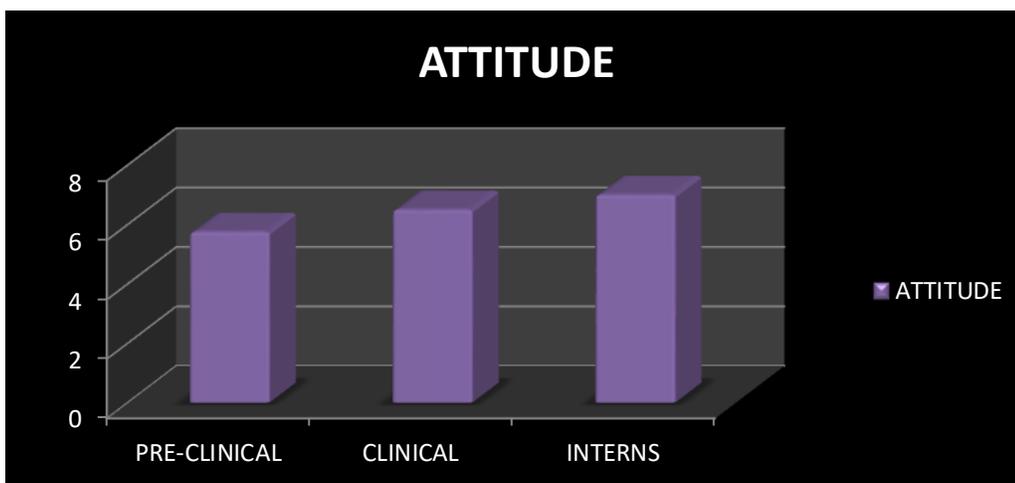


Fig-[3] Attitude among dental students

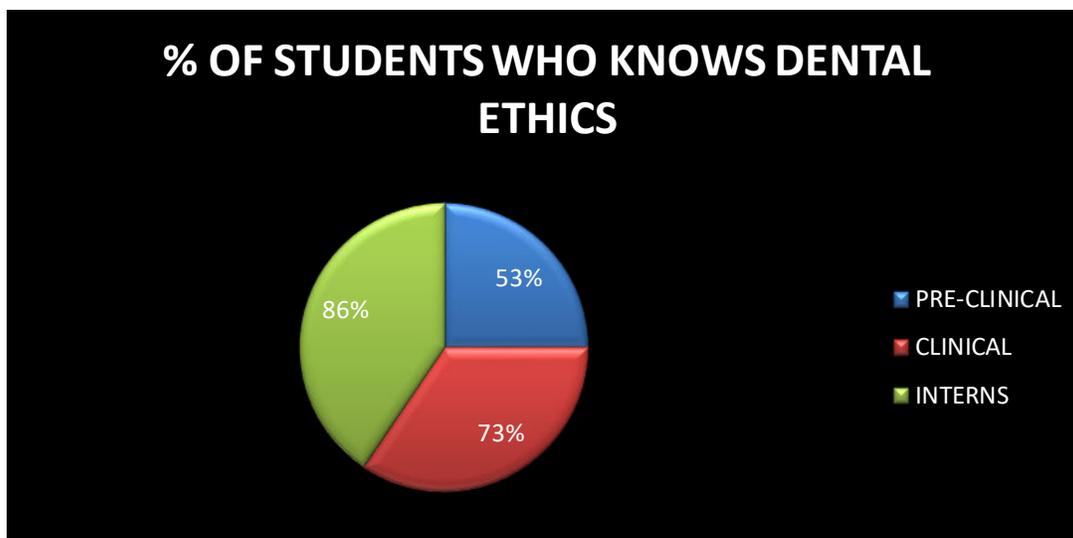


Fig-[4] Overall percentage on awareness, knowledge and attitude in dental ethics among dental students

DISCUSSIONS

In the past, apparent changes were noticed regarding what is morally or ethically acceptable to the society and the dental professionals need to be constantly updated so as to maintain their highest ethical values [15] Dentists have a unique potential of preparing a future generation ready to accept the preventive services. To keep the clinical practice in pace with the advancing dental sciences, the practitioner's knowledge and skills toward preventive care options need to improve. Practicing dentistry is an ethical venture and treating patients is just not technical, but patients are also invulnerable position as dentists do invade patient's body and take on their consciences.

A study by Prajna et al was conducted to assess the knowledge and practice of ethics in their line of work among practicing dentists from various dental colleges of Bangalore, Karnataka, India [16] This study was performed to find the knowledge ,attitude and self-awareness among undergraduates and to evaluate the significance of individuals ethical conduct and help them prioritize the code of ethics which functions as a standard of ethics for all practicing dental students. Participants had acquired more knowledge from experiences at work, and by attending seminars. The reason behind this difference could be that perhaps only those who had encountered ethical issues in any manner might have searched other sources of knowledge, such as continuing medical education, continuing dental education or workshops. [17] In the present study ,amongst the undergraduates,86 % interns were more knowledged than clinical(73%) and pre-clinical(53%) An open question regarding the code of dental ethics according to the American Dental Association.(ADA) and were asked to define dental ethics. Very few students were able to give answers in this section. Major replies came from clinical and interns. The students were asked on the attitude of dental ethics.i.e.,simple yes/ no responses.

This section showed higher significant differences in three different category of students. In a study majority of the participants, 90%, 93.3%, and 96.7% of them from Group 1, 2, and 3, respectively, knew that ethics are a science of morals in human conduct which deals with how one ought to behave and this was not statistically significant. [3] Other studies and researches show that postgraduates have higher knowledge and attitudes toward ethics. This can be due to the fact, Since healthcare ethics is not taught in the undergraduate level, it is more likely that senior doctors will have better knowledge and attitude either by experience or age. [18,19,20] Also very little research has investigated the attitudes of dental professional toward the concepts of research ethics including the acceptability of research ethics committees and their desire for training in research ethics qualitative studies to further explore the attitudes of faculty toward research ethics committees and practices in research committees.

The Dental Council of India, the regulatory body for dental education has drawn guidelines for curriculum in dental ethics which includes training in the final year of undergraduate program. However, there is no such systematic assessment other than the routine written tests during the curriculum which evaluates the student as a whole. Most of the research carried out in dentistry is by postgraduate students and very few studies are carried out by independent researchers or faculty members

CONCLUSIONS

Further in-depth analysis and evaluations need to be done to understand the difficulties faced during professional development. Practical approaches need to be further evolved to improve the curriculum and training of future students, so that they are able to identify and solves such dilemmas in practice.

This study concludes that knowledge, attitude and self-awareness on ethical values is comparatively present more in interns than among pre-clinical and clinical students. This study also emphasizes the need to provide the knowledge and awareness of ethics in academic curriculum and also include use of interactive techniques such as lectures, seminars and conferences to bring about increase in their knowledge in dental ethics. The findings of the present study also emphasizes the need for further research on how students in the health field fare in terms of ethical and moral behavior. The study also reveals that there is a need to develop innovative and educational initiatives. Due to financial constraint and smaller sample size, future studies are warranted at a larger level to investigate the knowledge, attitude, and practices using different teaching methods. Further in-depth analysis and evaluations need to be done to understand the difficulties faced during professional development. The values of ethics should be imparted to every dental graduate as a responsibility toward achieving the highest standards of dental health services.

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