

Thoughts and perceptions of a medical student far from home

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Introduction

I am studying for my M.D. degree here in Pecs, Hungary. Currently I am in my fourth year of medical training and over the years I have learnt and seen a lot about the medical profession. Medicine is probably one of the most noble professions. Medical practitioners are considered amongst the most honourable individuals, not only in our culture but in all societies around the world. Terms like humanity, compassion, service to the sick and most importantly morality are intrinsically attached to doctors. These are just a few of the ideals, other than obligations to the family, which propel a student to take up medicine. The medical profession is undoubtedly the most demanding fields in terms of time and effort.

Unethical practices

Unfortunately in recent times the medical profession is going through a rough patch, not so much due to any other reason but simply because of unethical practice surrounding the government and private health-care institutes. Not only that, as technology grows the doctors are also having to make decision that probably would not have been so complex, say twenty years ago. As we enter into the next century, we reflect back on the years gone by and we realise that we are already ahead of time. New instruments have been developed which are assisting us in our quest for better research and treatment for the sick. Such development has not only enlarged the frontiers for better research but has also brought a lot of controversies along with it, for example the recent sheep cloning incident in Great Britain. Being entrenched in the field of medicine, as many students and doctors are, one cannot help to notice that moral dilemmas are being taken lightly or they are overlooked completely. Such failures are the fault of those people who are either looking for materialistic gains or are going out for glory without giving notice to the ethical virtue of the matter. That, in my view is, where the relatively new discipline of Bioethics (medical ethics) has come to play a tremendous role in everyday medicine.

In recent times medical institutions all over the world have been riddled by controversial issues like euthanasia, genetic selection, abortion, animal experimentation, corruption just to name a few. Things like patient autonomy is no longer being spared either as certain doctors feel that the patient does not have the capacity to comprehend the depth of the matter. It may be accepted in certain conditions, but on the whole, I

feel it is un-called for. Similarly, corruption has become so highly associated with the ills of our health care system, that at times, it seems as if we cannot do without it. Corruption is not only seen in the form of bribes but also as unnecessary referrals of patient to private clinics, tipping nurses for certain favours, unethical human experimentation and so on.

Changing attitudes

C. L. Stevenson had suggested that 'ethical judgements express attitudes rather than describe them, and we disagree about ethics because we try by expressing our own attitude to bring our listeners to a similar attitude'. The would-be reformers all over the world are setting out to change the attitude of the medical professionals and the public alike, and always they are meeting difficulties. It is only when they succeed in winning the majority of the society over to their views that their ideas become dominant. Ethics is not a set of prohibitions as people may think. It is a simple guideline that has been constructed from the basic humanistic principles. In making ethical judgements, we go beyond our likes and dislikes. This, in my view is what helps us to build a stronger personality in order to become better human-beings and doctors. An ethical judgement that is not good in practice must suffer from theoretical defects as the whole point of ethical judgement is to guide practice. Bioethics helps us to have a more in-depth look at the more and less serious problems facing the medical profession. It is because of this, I feel that a course of bioethics should be included within the curriculum of medical colleges in the sub-continent as we so urgently require it.

Issues in Medical Ethics

It has been a very encouraging sign to see your journal come out, one issue after the other. It goes on to show that our societies in the sub-continent are becoming increasingly conscious of the way in which our health care systems are run. We do not have social consensus on many of the new developments and therefore, there is scope for many conflicting viewpoints that need to be brought out for general public discussion. Ours is an area where the rights and wrongs are decided on cultural and religious values, but where medical-ethics provides a parameter to help and face the moral challenges posed by technical advances and rapid social changes.

I hope the good and dedicated work of your journal continues and it enhances the effectiveness of our health-care system for the benefit of all.

References

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2. Beauchamp Tom L, Childress James F: *Principles of biomedical ethics* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Second edition 1983