

Lecture 3 & 4

‘Principles of Medical Ethics’ & ‘Attitudes in medical practice’

Principles of Medical Ethics in general

- 1- A physician shall provide medical care, with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.
- 2- A physician shall uphold the standards of professionalism, be honest in all professional interactions.
- 3- A physician shall respect the law and also recognize a responsibility to seek changes in those requirements which are contrary to the best interests of the patient.
- 4- A physician shall respect the rights of patients, colleagues, and other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient confidences and privacy
- 5- A physician shall continue to study, apply, and advance scientific knowledge.
- 6- A physician shall recognize a responsibility to participate in activities contributing to the improvement of the community.

Key ethical principles in patient care

‘It’s the rights of Patient’

1. **Autonomy:** (Respect of patient choice in health care) must protect and promote the choices of the patient and respect for self-determination.

In the case of immaturity of the patient or when there is a lack of mental ability to give decision. In case of fainting, loss of consciousness or young children, the decision is for his family or nearest relative.

The physician shall not compel the patient to take certain treatment without his consent.

Lack of specialized knowledge is not considered a barrier to patient, as the doctor expected to communicate details about the illness, all options of care available and the risks should be noticed by the patient to make informed decision.

With education and information patient is more empowered today and viewed as collaborators in health decisions. This principle of respect for

autonomy forms the basis of consent and confidentiality of ethical practice.

2. Beneficence (to do good):

The doctor is expected to use all his knowledge and training for the good of the patient. The best interest of the patient must take over any other consideration. This commitment to do good is reassuring to the patient who has to keep himself in the care of the doctor.

The principle of beneficence extends not only to the patient but also to the society and include the doctor' s role in public health, prevention of disease, and research.

3. Non maleficence: (not to act wrongly)

It is a central principle of medical ethics. This principle places a duty on the doctor to work in caution in his medical practice, in order to protect the vulnerable patient from any harm. The harm could be physical, psychological, or social. Physical harm can result for side effects of prescribed drugs. Violations or insufficient counseling can cause psychological harm. Gap in confidentiality can result in social harm in form of stigma in diseases like HIV, T.B, or leprosy.

It's not always possible to completely eliminate all risk or harm to patient. Drugs have side effects and medical procedures could be accompanied by risks.

Example: chemotherapy in cancer.

4. Principle of Justice:

In the health care it refers to fairness and nondiscrimination in medical practice.

The inequalities in society should not bias the doctor in choice of treatment and quality of care of the patient. This is not easily achieved but the doctor has a duty to ensure that every patient has equal access to the standard of care regardless of their gender, race, religion, social status or abilities.

In conclusion all patients should have equal access to medical care, including the following aspects:

1. Justice in the level of medical care.
2. Equitable allocation of resources.
3. Justice in the time available to each patient.
4. Fairness in respect of patients' moral values.

5. The fifth right: confidentiality of the patient: It is a matter of respecting the privacy of patients and encourages them to get medical care. Like other ethical duties may require examination of the patient and diagnose his illness and discuss some sensitive information about the patient's life, which is embarrassing or harmful if seen by other people.

The preservation of confidentiality has become increasingly difficult in this period of time after the preservation of information and record of patients in computers and the use of electronic archiving of data, exposing them to the dangers of electronic piracy and theft of information.

In conclusion all medical action must be in the patient's best interest and must be done with his or her consent.

‘The basic attitudes of medical ethics in medical practice’

- 1- Honesty, integrity and merit in medical work.
- 2- Critical self-appraisal. Which means self-evaluation by the doctor himself (Including acknowledgment of limits and errors)
- 3- Sympathy and Empathy, compassion and respect for patients and that his responsibility in the care of the patient.

- 4- Respect the roles of other healthcare professionals in patient care.
- 5- Attention to medical professional responsibilities towards the local and international community.
- 6- Commitment to clinical competence and lifelong education. Doctor should continue to study and apply, advance scientific knowledge, maintain commitment to medical education, make relevant information available to patients, colleagues, and the public, obtain consultation, and use the talents of other health professionals when necessary.
- 7- The physician must adhere to the standards of professionalism (professionalism in medical practice = knowledge, skills and behavior) and be honest in all professional interactions.
- 8- The doctor must respect the law and not commit anything contrary to the best interests of the patient.
- 9- The doctor must respect the rights of patients, colleagues, and other health professionals, and safeguard the patient's secrets and the privacy of the profession.

10- The doctor should recognize his responsibility to participate in activities that contribute to the improvement of society and improve public health.