

Knowledge, attitude and practice regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities among dentists in tricity: A questionnaire-based cross-sectional study

¹Dr. Navneet Kaur, Associate Professor, Department of Periodontics and Oral Implantology, National Dental College and Hospital, Derabassi, Mohali, Punjab, India

²Manmeet Kaur, BDS, Dental Intern, National Dental College & Hospital, Derabassi, Punjab 140507, India

³Dr. Sumit Kaushal, Professor, Department of Periodontics and Oral Implantology, National Dental College and Hospital, Derabassi, Mohali, Punjab, India

Corresponding Author: Dr. Navneet Kaur, Associate Professor, Department of Periodontics and Oral Implantology, National Dental College and Hospital, Derabassi, Mohali, Punjab, India

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Abstract

Introduction: Dental ethics and legal responsibilities are fundamental components of dental practice that guide professional conduct and ensure patient safety and trust. With increasing patient awareness and rising medico-legal issues, it has become essential for dental professionals to possess adequate knowledge and follow ethical and legal standards in clinical practice. Assessing the knowledge, attitude, and practice of dentists regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities is necessary to identify gaps and improve ethical standards in dentistry.

Aim & Objective: To evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of dental professionals regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities in Tricity region.

Material & Method: 50 participants were recruited randomly and the survey link was sent through WhatsApp, Facebook groups and via QR codes to dental professionals in Tricity region. Participation was voluntary and anonymous without any incentive given for participation. The survey consisted of closed-ended 23 questions divided into sections of demographic details and knowledge, attitude, and practice regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities. The percentage response for each question from all participants was obtained and the data was calculated and analysed using

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software 22.0.

Results: 98% of participants were aware of the Consumer Protection Act in dentistry and 92% participants were agreed regarding dental negligence as its failure to provide standard care. 78% participants strongly agreed that informed consent is necessary for all dental procedures, while 22% dental professionals were neutral for informed consent. Only 36% dental professionals reported that obtaining written consent before surgical procedures is mandatory while 64% dental professionals obtained the patient consent sometimes.

Conclusion: There is a good to fair level of knowledge with positive attitude about dental ethics and legal responsibilities among dental professionals. Based on the findings of the survey it highlighted the need for improved education and training programs to ensure ethical and legally compliant dental practice.

Keywords: Dental Ethics, Legal Responsibilities, Dental practitioners, medico-legal issues, negligence

Introduction

Ethics plays a vital role in healthcare professions, including dentistry, as it guides professionals in providing appropriate, safe, and patient-centered care. Dental ethics refers to the moral principles and standards that regulate the professional conduct of dentists. These ethical principles include autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and veracity, which ensure respect for patients' rights, promote patient welfare, and prevent harm.¹ In addition to ethical principles, dentists must also comply with legal responsibilities established by regulatory authorities such as the Dental Council of India. Legal responsibilities in dental practice include obtaining informed consent, maintaining patient

confidentiality, proper record keeping, avoiding negligence, and practicing within the scope of professional competence. Failure to comply with ethical and legal standards can result in medico-legal consequences, loss of professional reputation, and compromised patient care.²

With increasing awareness among patients regarding their rights and the growing number of medico-legal cases, it has become essential for dental practitioners to possess adequate knowledge and maintain proper ethical and legal practices.³ However, despite the importance of these principles, there may be variations in knowledge, attitude, and implementation among dental professionals. The Tricity region, consisting of Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali, has a large and diverse population of dental practitioners working in private clinics, hospitals, and academic institutions. However, limited information is available regarding their knowledge, attitude, and practice concerning dental ethics and legal responsibilities.

Therefore, the survey was conducted with an aim to assess the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice regarding Dental Ethics and Legal Responsibilities among Dentists in Tricity: A Questionnaire-Based Cross-Sectional Study, aims to assess the awareness, perception, and practices of dental professionals regarding ethical and legal aspects of dental practice.

Material & Method

Source of data: For the proposed survey 50 dentists and practitioners were enrolled from Tricity region.

Methodology: A questionnaire survey was prepared using Google Forms which was circulated to dental professionals in Tricity region. The survey link was shared electronically through:

- WhatsApp

- Facebook groups/QR code

For the proposed study, around 50 dental professionals were enrolled from Tricity region. The participants were recruited by convenience sampling through the contacts of the authors. Participation was voluntary and anonymous without any incentive given for participation. The survey consisted of closed-ended questions divided into sections of:

- Demographic details
- Knowledge regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities
- Attitude regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities
- Practice regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities

Inclusion Criteria: Dental professionals in Tricity region

Exclusion Criteria: Non-dental professionals and incomplete questionnaire responses

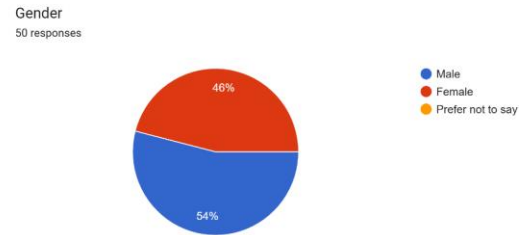
Results

A total of 50 dental professionals from the Tricity region participated in this questionnaire-based cross-sectional study.

Demographic characteristics

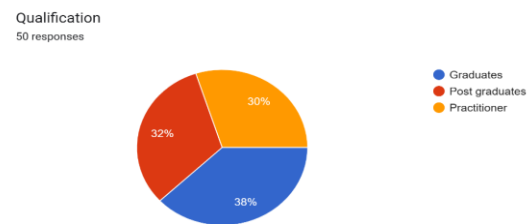
The demographic distribution of the study participants showed that the majority of dental professionals were in the younger age groups. Among the total 50 participants, 15 (30%) belonged to the age group of 20–25 years, followed by 14 (28%) in the 26–30 years age group, 12 (24%) in the 31–35 years age group, and 9 (18%) participants were above 35 years of age.

With regard to gender distribution, 27 (54%) participants were males, while 23 (46%) were females, indicating a nearly equal representation of both genders.



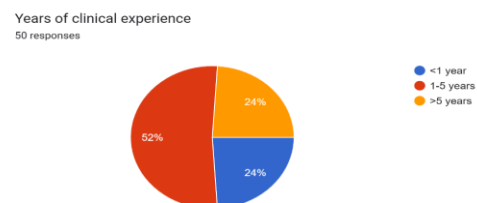
Graph 1

Based on educational qualification, 19 (38%) participants were graduates, 16 (32%) were postgraduates, and 15 (30%) were dental practitioners.



Graph 2

In terms of clinical experience, more than half of the participants, 26 (52%), had 1–5 years of experience, whereas 12 (24%) participants had less than 1 year of experience and another 12 (24%) had more than 5 years of clinical experience. This indicates that the majority of participants had early to moderate levels of professional experience.



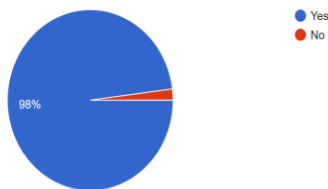
Graph 3

Knowledge regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities

All participants were aware of the terminology of dental ethics and the Code of Ethics by the DCI. 98% participants correctly identified ethical principles with

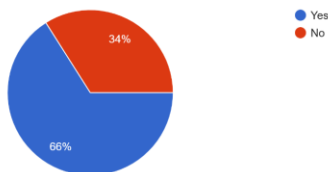
2% participants identified the principle of beneficence. Majority of participants reported that obtaining informed consent before treatment is mandatory and all the participants agreed that patient confidentiality should always be maintained. 98% of participants were aware of the Consumer Protection Act in dentistry and 92% participants were agreed regarding dental negligence as its failure to provide standard care. 66% participants were aware regarding the improper diagnosis can lead to legal action, while 34% participants were not aware.

Are you aware of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) in dentistry?
50 responses



Graph 4

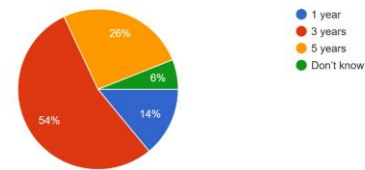
Can improper diagnosis lead to legal action?
50 responses



Graph 5

Regarding record maintenance duration, 54% dental professionals responded to maintain the record for the time period of 3 years, 26% responded to maintain the record for the time period of 5 years and 14% dental professionals maintain the record only for 1 year, only 6 % dentists did not aware regarding the record maintenance.

How long should dental records be maintained?
50 responses

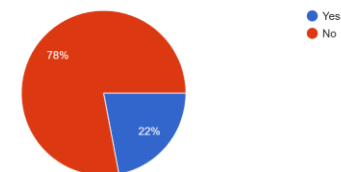


Graph 6

Attitude regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities

A positive attitude towards ethical practice was observed among participants. 78% participants strongly agreed that informed consent is necessary for all dental procedures, while 22% dental professionals were neutral for informed consent. Also 78% dentists believed that it is unethical to treat a patient without explaining risks, while 22% dentist accepted to treat a patient without explaining risks. Each dental professionals believed that more education on dental ethics is required and agreed that dental ethics should be taught in detail in the BDS curriculum.

Is it ethical to treat a patient without explaining risks?
50 responses

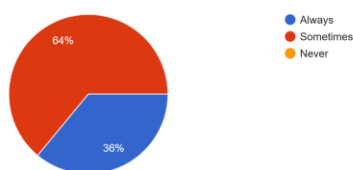


Graph 7

Practice regarding dental ethics and legal responsibilities

Only 36% dental professionals reported that obtaining written consent before surgical procedures is mandatory while 64% dental professionals obtained the patient consent sometimes.

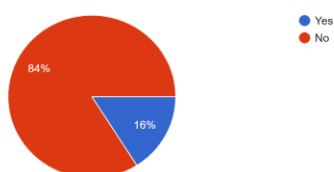
Do you obtain written consent before surgical procedures?
50 responses



Graph 8

58% dentists were aware and maintained patient records regularly while 42% did not maintain records regularly. 84% dental professionals had not faced any medico-legal issues while 16% dentists had faced medico-legal issues.

Have you ever faced medico-legal issues?
50 responses

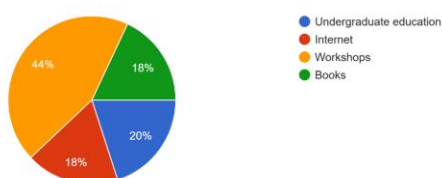


Graph 9

Source of knowledge

The most common source of knowledge were workshops (44%), followed by undergraduate education (20%), books (18%), and internet (18%).

Your source of knowledge about dental ethics
50 responses



Graph 10

Discussion

Dental ethics and legal responsibilities are essential components of dental practice, as they guide professional conduct, protect patient rights, and help prevent medico-legal complications. The present survey assessed the knowledge, attitude, and practice regarding

dental ethics and legal responsibilities among dental professionals in the Tricity region.

Based on the results of the present survey, majority of participants belonged to the younger age group and had moderate clinical experience. This reflects the growing involvement of young dental professionals in clinical practice and highlights the importance of strengthening ethical education early in their careers. The results of the survey revealed that most dental professionals had good knowledge regarding dental ethics, ethical principles, and legal responsibilities such as informed consent and patient confidentiality. Similar findings were reported by Khandelwal et al. (2015), who observed that the majority of dental practitioners were aware of ethical principles and their importance in clinical practice.⁴ This high level of awareness may be attributed to ethical education during undergraduate and postgraduate training, as well as increasing awareness of medico-legal issues in dentistry.

Patient confidentiality is a fundamental ethical obligation in dental practice. In the present survey all participants agreed that patient confidentiality should be maintained. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Sharif et al. (2014), who also reported high awareness among dental professionals regarding the importance of maintaining confidentiality.⁵ This reflects the understanding among dental practitioners that protecting patient information is essential for maintaining trust and professional integrity. Informed consent is another important legal and ethical requirement in dental practice. The results of the present survey showed that most participants were aware of the importance of informed consent. Similar results were reported by Doshi et al. (2017), who found that dental practitioners had good knowledge regarding informed

consent and its importance in protecting both the patient and the dentist.⁶

However, despite adequate knowledge, gaps were observed in the actual implementation of ethical practices. In the present survey, only a limited number of participants reported that they always obtaining written informed consent and many dental professionals did not maintain proper patient records regularly. This indicates a gap between knowledge and practice. Similar findings were reported by Sandeep et al. (2016), who found that although dental professionals had good knowledge and a positive attitude toward ethics, their implementation in clinical practice was not satisfactory.⁷ Proper maintenance of dental records is essential for continuity of care and legal protection. Inadequate record-keeping can increase the risk of medico-legal complications. Bebeau (2007) emphasized that ethical knowledge alone is not sufficient unless it is translated into clinical practice.⁸ This supports the findings of the present survey which demonstrated that although participants were aware of ethical principles, their practical application was limited.

In the present survey, small percentage of participants reported having faced medico-legal issues. This reflects the increasing number of legal cases in dentistry due to rising patient awareness and expectations. These findings highlight the importance of proper documentation, informed consent, and adherence to ethical guidelines to prevent legal complications. All participants believed that more education and training regarding dental ethics is mandatory. This indicates a positive attitude toward improving ethical standards. Continuing dental education programs, workshops, and training sessions can help enhance knowledge and improve ethical practices among dental professionals.^{9,10}

Overall, the findings of the present survey indicate that dental professionals in the Tricity region have good knowledge and a positive attitude toward dental ethics and legal responsibilities. However, there is a gap between knowledge and practice, particularly in areas such as obtaining written consent and maintaining patient records. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted among dental professionals.^{11,12} Further studies and more surveys are needed with large ample size to be conducted in different regions of India to monitor the medico legal issues and unethical dental practice. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen ethical education during undergraduate and postgraduate training and to conduct regular continuing dental education programs to improve ethical practices. Improving ethical awareness and practice will help enhance patient care, maintain professional integrity, and reduce medico-legal risks in dental practice.

Conclusion

The findings of the survey showed a positive attitude and ethical dental practice with good understanding of dental ethics and legal responsibilities. Dental professionals are obliged to follow the ethical and legal practice without any medical issues in order to make the practice ethical. However, it is further recommended that the gap in between knowledge and practice should be monitored and conduct more workshops, CD programmes or lectures on dental ethics and legal responsibilities. Training programmes for the graduates and dental practitioners should be arranged in a way to intensify the knowledge in order to implement in daily practice and more information should be added to dental curriculum.

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