

## Evaluation of medical ethics application in Hail, KSA

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**Abstract:** *Objectives:* The aim of the study is to assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices among healthcare professionals in Hail in relation to healthcare ethics and law. *Background:* Throughout history, men have repeatedly made judgments regarding their own conduct and that of their fellow men. Some acts have been judged to be right or good, while other acts have been denounced as wrong or evil. Ethical judgment in medicine is an attempt to distinguish between good and bad conduct. Recently, numerous attempts have been made to establish national clinical research documents in the countries of the Middle East. This article analyzes these documents. *Method:* Questionnaires were used. The program of SPSS (Cohort method) was used for statistical analysis of the results. *Result:* The mean of total agreements of application of ethics of medical students was 80.13%. While, 92.3% of governmental hospitals' physicians had studied ethics, with a mean of total agreements of ethics application 84.44%. In private hospitals' physicians had a mean of their agreements of ethics application was 77.25%. *Conclusion:* The medical ethics in Hail was highly applied. The third-year ethics course should be maintained, as the students found it appealing and interesting. Continuous medical education of ethics is essential for health care practitioners to follow the Islamic medical ethics

**Keywords:** Medical Ethics, Health Care Professionals, Hail, Hail University, Medical Students, Governmental Hospitals, Private Hospitals.

### Introduction

In the past three decades, medical ethics has emerged as a priority within medical education institutions and among ethics educators [1]. Ethics is an understanding of the nature of conflicts arising from moral imperatives and how best we may deal with them. Specifically it deals with conflicts in potential outcome (consequences of actions) or with duties and obligations [1-2].

Ethics does not decide what is morally right or wrong; rather it considers how we should act best in the light of our duties and obligations as moral agents. Clinicians have specific duties of care to their patients and to society. It is generally held that clinicians should always act in the best interest of their patients; but sometimes there is a conflict between obligations to a patient and those perceived to be owed to the community or to other patients. It may not always be the case that what the clinician believes is in the best interest of the patient is what the patient wishes or will consent to. Central to modern medical ethics is a respect for patient autonomy and the fundamental principle of informed consent [2]. Medical Ethics is a practical subject as well as a branch of moral

philosophy. Ethics is an integral part of good medical practice. It is an essential branch of medicine. Ethics deals with the choices we make and our actions in relation to those choices. It deals with choices made by both clinicians and patients and the duties and obligations of clinicians to their patients. Medical ethics also deals with the choices made by society, the distribution of resources and access to health care and the dilemmas arising from them [3].

Patients have duties and obligations too, which is why we should respect them as moral agents. Parents have duties of care to their children; and sometimes a clinician's duty to a child patient may conflict with those of the parents, and this needs an ethical approach to resolve [1-2].

*Aim of the study:* this study was done to evaluate the application of medical ethics in medical field in Hail. In an attempt to assist in guiding their professional conduct and aid in curriculum development.

**Material and Methods**

Questionnaire was designed and distributed on student in collage of medicine 4th year and physicians in general and private hospitals in Hail, to become 3 groups:

Group 1- students (4th and 6th years) "45"

Group 2- physicians in government hospitals (KKH and Hail hospital) "26"

Group 3- physicians in private hospitals (Salamat - Alsafa - Alkhaleej - Alrayan) "39"

The program of SPSS (Cohort method) was used for statistical analysis of the results [4].

**Results**

**Group-I of medical students in Hail University (total 45)**

<b>Table-I: Results of questionnaire of medical students in Hail University (total 45)</b>						
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>To some extent</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1. Did you study medical Ethics before?	45	100%	0	0%	0	0%
2. Do you think that the health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession?	44	97.8%	1	2.2%	0	0%
3. Do you think that ethics of the health practitioner has positive effect on his patients?	45	100%	0	0%	0	0%
4. Do you think that dealing with colleagues ethically has positive effect?	44	97.8%	1	2.2%	0	0%
5. Have you ever found a health practitioner that behaves unethically?!	2	4.4%	3	6.7%	40	88.9%
6. Do you think that it is necessary for a physician to have intensive courses of the ethics from time to time?!	33	73.3%	12	26.7%	0	0%
7. Do you support the importance of teaching medical ethics in the medical training?!	44	97.8%	1	2.2%	0	0%
8. In your opinion, does the (secret of the core values) relationship between doctor and his patient depend mainly on confidentiality?	45	100%	0	0%	0	0%
9. Are you influenced by the Medical Ethics in the recent evolution of the concept of patients' rights?	23	51.1%	18	40.0%	4	8.9%
10. Can the study of ethics be contributed to manage the ethical problems faced by the doctor at the practice of medicine?	23	51.1%	21	46.7%	1	2.2%
11. Did the study of different ethics rules increase your knowledge to make a decision ethically?	33	73.3%	12	26.7%	0	0%
12. Have you explained the importance of the study of ethics commitment to the interests of the patient's doctor without any racial or religious discrimination?	42	93.3%	2	4.4%	1	2.2%
13. Is there problem or a condition that forces you to behave unethically?	2	4.4%	6	13.3%	37	82.2%

Evaluation Questions	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	To some extent	Percent
14. Does the study of medical ethics help you to know your duties as a doctor?	41	91.1%	4	8.9%	0	0%
15. Does the study of medical ethics help you to know the patient's rights?	43	95.6%	2	4.4%	0	0%
16. Can medical ethics be subjected to changes?	7	15.6%	22	48.9%	16	35.6%
17. Is Medical Ethics rules varies according to countries?	23	51.1%	13	28.9%	9	20.0%
18. Do the rules of Medical Ethics contributed to the development of your interaction with emergency situations in the absence of another doctor?	29	64.4%	12	26.7%	4	8.9%
19. 19-Do you think it is necessary to take the patient's consent before any action?	41	91.1%	4	8.9%	0	0%
20. 20-Is there a specialized department set the ethical rules in your hospital?	13	28.9%	15	33.3%	17	37.8%
21. 21-Do the new technology and recent medical problems emerged a new ethical issues?	24	53.3%	14	31.1%	7	15.6%
22. 22-Do you have difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values?	4	8.9%	7	15.6%	34	75.6%
23. 23-Did Medical Ethics help you to know your duties towards your community?	37	82.2%	8	17.8%	0	0%
24. 24-Have you ever received an offer from a pharmaceutical company to market one of its products?	0	0%	0	0%	45	100%
<b>Mean of total agreement</b>	<b>80.13 %</b>					

Table-I showed that 100% of medical students in faculty of medicine, Hail University had studied ethics, thought that ethics of the health practitioner has positive effect on his patients, that relationship between doctor and his patient depends mainly on confidentiality and never received any offer from pharmaceutical companies before (questions 1, 3, 8 and 24). Also a high percentages (more than 90%) agreed that health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession, dealing with colleagues ethically has a positive effect, support the importance of teaching medical ethics in the medical training, explained the importance of the study of ethics commitment to the interests of the patient's doctor without any racial or religious discrimination, the

study of medical ethics help them to know their duties as doctors, help them to know the patient's rights and the necessity to take the patient's consent before any action ( questions 2, 4, 7, 12,14, 15 and 19).

On the other hand, the least agreements (less than 10%) were about finding any health practitioner that behaved unethically, exposure to any problem or a condition that forced them to behave unethically and facing any difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values \* questions 5, 13 and 22). The other questions showed different percentage variation in students' answers. The mean of total agreements was 80.13%.

**Group-II: Physicians in Governmental Hospitals (Total 26)**

<b>Table-II: Results of questionnaire of physicians in Governmental Hospitals (Total 26)</b>						
<b>Questions of evaluation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>To some extent</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1. Did you study medical Ethics before?	24	92.3%	0	0%	2	7.7%
2. Do you think that the health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession?	26	100.0%	0	0%	0	0%
3. Do you think that ethics of the health practitioner has positive effect on his patients?	26	100.0%	0	0%	0	0%
4. Do you think that dealing with colleagues ethically has positive effect?	25	96.2%	1	3.8%	0	0%
5. Have you ever found a health practitioner that behaves unethically?!	14	53.8%	1	3.8%	11	42.3%
6. Do you think that it is necessary for a physician to have intensive courses of the ethics from time to time?!	22	84.6%	3	11.5%	1	3.8%
7. Do you support the importance of teaching medical ethics in the medical training?!	24	92.3%	1	3.8%	1	3.8%
8. In your opinion, does the (secret of the core values) relationship between doctor and his patient depend mainly on confidentiality?	25	96.2%	1	3.8%	0	0%
9. Are you influenced by the Medical Ethics in the recent evolution of the concept of patients' rights	11	42.3%	12	46.2%	3	11.5%
10. Can the study of ethics be contributed to manage the ethical problems faced by the doctor at the practice of medicine?	15	57.7%	8	30.8%	3	11.5%
11. Did the study of different ethics rules increase your knowledge to make a decision ethically?	17	65.4%	7	26.9%	2	7.7%
12. Have you explained the importance of the study of ethics commitment to the interests of the patient's doctor without any racial or religious discrimination? In your relation with your patients, do you discriminate between them racially or religiously?	20	76.9%	6	23.1%	0	0%
13. Is there a problem or a condition that forces you to behave unethically?	0	0%	9	34.6%	17	65.4%
14. Does the study of medical ethics help you to know your duties as a doctor?	19	73.1%	7	26.9%	0	0%
15. Does the study of medical ethics help you to know the patient's rights?	21	80.8%	4	15.4%	1	3.8%
16. Can medical ethics be subjected to changes?	8	30.8%	11	42.3%	7	26.9%
17. Is Medical Ethics rules varies according to countries?	16	61.5%	6	23.1%	4	15.4%

Evaluation Questions	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	To some extent	Percent
18. Do the rules of Medical Ethics contributed to the development of your interaction with emergency situations in the absence of another doctor?	19	73.15	5	19.2%	2	7.7%
19. Do you think it is necessary to take the patient's consent before any action?	20	76.9%	5	19.2%	1	3.8%
20. Is there a specialized department set the ethical rules in your hospital?	16	61.5%	5	19.2%	5	19.2%
21. Do the new technology and recent medical problems have emerged a new ethical issues?	15	57.7%	7	26.9%	4	15.4%
22. Do you have difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values?	4	15.4%	9	34.6%	13	50.0%
23. Did Medical Ethics help you to know your duties towards your community?	20	76.9%	5	19.2%	1	3.8%
24. Have you ever received an offer from a pharmaceutical company to market one of its products?	7	26.9%	0	0%	19	73.1%
<b>Mean of total agreement</b>	<b>84.44%</b>					

Table-II showed the answers of governmental hospitals' physicians to the present study questionnaire. It showed that 92.3% of governmental hospitals' physicians had studied ethics. 100% of them thought that health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession and ethics (questions 2 and 3). Also, more than 90% thought that that dealing with colleagues ethically has positive effect, supported the importance of teaching medical ethics in the medical training and relationship between doctor and his patient depend mainly on confidentiality ( questions 4, 7 and 8). On the other hand, the least

agreements were about their exposure to any problem or a condition that forced them to behave unethically (0%), while 15.4% had difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values and 26.9% had received an offer from a pharmaceutical company to market one of its products (questions 13, 22 and 24).

The other questions showed different percentage variation in governmental hospitals' doctors' answers as seen in the table. The mean of total agreements was 84.44%.

**Group III: Physicians in private hospitals (Total 39)**

Evaluation Questions	Yes	percent	No	percent	To some extent	percent
1. Did you study medical Ethics before?	35	89.7%	0	0%	4	10.3%
2. Do you think that the health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession?	39	100%	0	0%	0	0%
3. Do you think that ethics of the health practitioner has positive effect on his patients?	38	97.4%	1	2.6%	0	0%
4. Do you think that dealing with colleagues ethically has positive effect?	39	100%	0	0%	0	0%
5. Have you ever found a health practitioner that behaves unethically?!	5	12.8%	1	2.6%	33	84.6%

Evaluation Questions	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	To some extent	Percent
6. Do you think that it is necessary for a physician to have intensive courses of the ethics from time to time?!	23	59%	15	38.5%	1	2.6%
7. Do you support the importance of teaching medical ethics in the medical training?!	31	79.5%	7	17.9%	1	2.6%
8. In your opinion, does the (secret of the core values) relationship between doctor and his patient depend mainly on confidentiality ?	39	100%	0	0%	0	0%
9. Are you influenced by the Medical Ethics in the recent evolution of the concept of patients' rights?	15	38.5%	16	41.0%	8	20.5%
10. Can the study of ethics be contributed to manage the ethical problems faced by the doctor at the practice of medicine?	17	43.6%	19	48.7%	3	7.7%
11. Did the study of different ethics rules increase your knowledge to make a decision ethically?	23	59.0%	14	35.9%	2	5.1%
12. Have you explained the importance of the study of ethics commitment to the interests of the patient's doctor without any racial or religious discrimination? In your relation with your patients, do you discriminate between them racially or religiously?	33	84.6%	6	15.4%	0	0%
13. Is there problem or a condition that forces you to behave unethically?	0	0%	10	25.6%	29	74.4%
14. Does the study of medical ethics help you to know your duties as a doctor?	32	82.1%	6	15.4%	1	2.6%
15. Does the study of medical ethics help you to know the patient's rights?	31	79.5%	6	15.4%	2	5.1%
16. Can medical ethics be subjected to changes?	1	2.6%	9	23.1%	29	74.4%
17. Is Medical Ethics rules varies according to countries?	1	2.6%	17	43.6%	21	53.8%
18. Do the rules of Medical Ethics contributed to the development of your interaction with emergency situations in the absence of another doctor?	26	66.7%	4	10.3%	9	23.1%
19. Do you think it is necessary to take the patient's consent before any action?	36	92.3%	3	7.7%	0	0%
20. Is there a specialized department set the ethical rules in your hospital?	5	12.8%	5	12.8%	29	74.4%
21. Do the new technology and recent medical problems emerged a new ethical issues ?	24	61.5%	12	30.8%	3	7.7%
22. Do you have difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values?	7	17.9%	7	17.9%	25	64.1%
23. Did Medical Ethics help you to know your duties towards your community?	23	59.0%	14	35.9%	2	5.1%
24. Have you ever received an offer from a pharmaceutical company to market one of its products?	28	71.8%	0	0%	11	28.2%
<b>Mean of total agreement</b>	<b>77.25%</b>					

Table-III showed the responses of private hospitals' physicians to the present study questionnaire. It showed that 89.7% of private hospitals' physicians had studied ethics. 100% thought that health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession, dealing with colleagues ethically has positive effect and relationship between doctor and his patient depend mainly on confidentiality (questions 2, 4 and 8). Also, more than 90% thought that ethics of the health practitioner has positive effect on his patients, that it is necessary to take the patient's consent before any action (questions 3 and 19). On the other hand, the least agreements were about finding any health practitioner that behaved unethically, exposure to any problem or a condition that forced them to behave unethically, medical ethics could be subjected to changes, Medical Ethics rules can vary according to countries, the presence of specialized department that set the ethical rules in their hospital and facing any difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values \* questions 5, 13, 16, 17, 20 and 22). The other questions showed different percentage variation in private hospitals' doctors' answers as seen in the table. The mean of all agreements was 77.25%

### Discussion

The official code of medical ethics [5] explains in a precise manner the duties a doctor owes to a patient. It also specifies behaviour between doctors as well as with the other health professions. Every practicing doctor must have his name registered with the Medical Council. It is obvious that medical ethics education has become a universal component of undergraduate formal medical training in most countries [5].

Our survey has shed some light on application of medical ethics education in Hail. In the present study the mean number of respondents of medical students who were "satisfied "or "moderately satisfied" reached 80.13% in group 1. This is a good sign of education and applying medical ethics in faculty of medicine, Hail University, since 100% were studying medical ethics in the faculty. Nearly the same percentage of application of medical ethics was reported China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia, while in Korea and Malaysia, this ratio was 50 to 60% or lower [6]. Table I showed that 100% of

medical students in faculty of medicine, Hail University had studied ethics, thought that ethics of the health practitioner has positive effect on his patients, that relationship between doctor and his patient depends mainly on confidentiality and never received any offer from pharmaceutical companies before (questions 1, 3, 8 and 24). Also a high percentages (more than 90%) agreed that health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession, dealing with colleagues ethically has a positive effect, support the importance of teaching medical ethics in the medical training, explained the importance of the study of ethics commitment to the interests of the patient's doctor without any racial or religious discrimination, the study of medical ethics help them to know their duties as doctors, help them to know the patient's rights and the necessity to take the patient's consent before any action ( questions 2, 4, 7, 12,14, 15 and 19).

Medical ethics were a part of medicine curriculum in Hail university in the third year. The course on ethics in our medical school is based on Islamic principles. Similarly, it was reported that courses in ethics were taught in the first and third years at the College of Medicine at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia [7]. They added that Medical students face ethical issues in their careers, as early as the first year of medical school [2]. It is therefore imperative that education in bioethics start early. Although medical students may acquire some of their ethics education passively through osmosis during their clerkships [7]. Nearly similar results was reported by Lehmann et al. (in 2004) [8].

They sent questionnaires to 125 U.S. medical schools and 16 Canadian medical schools. The response rate was 87% (123 schools). Seventy-one (78%) of the schools had medical ethics integrated as part of a larger course, such as Introduction to Clinical Medicine. This is an increase from what the prior studies found, where only 60% of the schools taught ethics as part of a larger course [9-10]. The authors found that common barriers to medical ethics instruction were: lack of time in the curriculum, lack of qualified teachers [8].

On the other hand, the least agreements (less than 10%) , in group 1, were about finding any health practitioner that behaved unethically, exposure to any problem or a condition that forced them to behave unethically and facing any difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values ( questions 5, 13 and 22). The contemporary ethical issues and dilemmas that our students considered should be included in the bioethics course are challenges for practicing physicians, health care institutions, families and the whole community [7].

In the present work, the mean of total agreement of application of medical ethics of physicians in governmental hospital in KKH and Hail hospital (group II), was 84.44%. This result showed a high sign of application of medical ethics in governmental hospitals, since 92.3% of the sample of group 2 studied medical ethics before (table II). 100% of them thought that health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession and ethics (questions 2 and 3). Also, more than 90% thought that that dealing with colleagues ethically has positive effect, supported the importance of teaching medical ethics in the medical training and relationship between doctor and his patient depend mainly on confidentiality ( questions 4, 7 and 8).

On the other hand, the least agreements were about their exposure to any problem or a condition that forced them to behave unethically (0%), while 15.4% had difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values and 26.9% had received an offer from a pharmaceutical company to market one of its products (questions 13, 22 and 24). SCFHS in KSA has published Code of ethics for healthcare practioners [6].

This helped the physicians to practice ethics in the Kingdom. Also, in a study carried out in an area included the three main Saudi cities of Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, as well as other smaller cities (Taif (west) and Tabuk (north)) Out of 110 participants, 90 replied in the study period giving a response rate of 82%. Following the first round, 32 ethical issues were identified, the top three of which were: Patients' rights (55; 61%), confidentiality of patients' information (41; 46%), and medical negligence / error (31; 34%). The least important were: Language barrier, private sections in public hospitals, and nursing practices (2, 2, and 1%, respectively) [9].

In the present work, the mean percentage of total agreement in physicians in the private hospitals in Hail city (group 3) was 77.25%. 89.4% of those physicians studied ethics before (table III). 100% thought that health practitioner must comply with the ethics of his profession, dealing with colleagues ethically has positive effect and relationship between doctor and his patient depends mainly on confidentiality (questions 2, 4 and 8). Also, more than 90% thought that ethics of the health practitioner has positive effect on his patients, that it is necessary to take the patient's consent before any action (questions 3 and 19).

On the other hand, the least agreements were about finding any health practitioner that behaved unethically, exposure to any problem or a condition that forced them to behave unethically, medical ethics could be subjected to changes, Medical Ethics rules can vary according to countries, the presence of specialized department that set the ethical rules in their hospital and facing any difficulties in maintaining medical ethical values \* questions 5, 13, 16, 17, 20 and 22).

Alkabba et al (2012) [9] in KSA, reported that the major 10 ethical issues, as perceived by the participants in order of their importance, were: [9]

- (1) Patients' Rights
- (2) Equity of resources
- (3) Confidentiality of the patients
- (4) Patient Safety
- (5) Conflict of Interests
- (6) Ethics of privatization
- (7) Informed Consent
- (8) Dealing with the opposite sex
- (9) Beginning and end of life, and
- (10) Healthcare team ethics.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The medical ethics in Hail was highly applied. The third-year ethics course should be maintained, as the students found it appealing, interesting and relevant. Continuous medical education of ethics is essential for health care practitioners. They should be up to date to follow the Islamic medical ethics. Teaching applied ethics is more important than theory



and, possibly resulting in a change of behaviour. Topics that are applicable to future practice should be given higher priority, especially if they

are not discussed in other courses. Topics identified as priorities by experts in health care should be considered.

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