Development of Ethics and Professionalism in Sri Lanka

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A code of Ethics is one of the hallmarks of a profession. Prior to 1992, the Medical Ordinance of Sri Lanka, laid down by an act of parliament in 1927, was the only document that promulgated a code of behavior for doctors. The Ceylon Medical Council performed the regulatory function of monitoring ethical behavior in the medical profession.

In 1992 the Sri Lanka Medical Association formed an Ethics Committee with the objective of dealing with General Ethics relating to professional practice. An Ethical Review Committee was formed a few years later, to deal with research ethics.

Recognizing the importance of incorporating good ethical principles in our day to day practice, the SLMA published the Declaration of Health in 1995.

The Committee also published Ethical Criteria for the promotion of Medicinal Drugs and Devices in Sri Lanka in the same year.

The Ethics Committee, comprising of medical professionals representing the different specialist Colleges and Associations, representatives of the legal profession and members of the public meets monthly. Various ethical issues that have been referred to the committee from the Council are taken up for discussion and appropriate action taken. The committee also organizes Symposia and Workshops on ethical topics, and publishes articles in the monthly News Letter of the SLMA, drawing the attention of the medical profession to current ethical problems.

Problems that have been dealt with in the current year are
• Complaints that inadequate time is spent on consultations with specialists
• Prevention of Medical Negligence
• Informed Consent
• Broadcast Publicity
• Advertising by professionals and institutions

Other areas of activity
• SLMA has representation in the Ethics Committee of the Sri Lanka Medical Council which has produced a document on “Provisional Code of Practice for assisted Reproductive Technologies”
• SLMA has representation in the National Bio Ethics Committee of the National Science Foundation and is involved in drafting a Human Reproduction and Genetics Act
• National Bio Ethics Committee which is chaired by the Chairperson Ethical Review Committee of the SLMA is currently examining the deficiencies in the current regulations dealing with Human Genetic Data Collection
• Involved with the ERC of the Faculty of Medicine Colombo in the formulation of Uniform Guidelines for Ethics Research Committees

The Sri Lanka Medical Association is justly proud of its achievements so far in initiating, monitoring and propagating high standards of ethical behavior and professionalism in the medical profession in Sri Lanka. As the national medical association, we are committed to ensure continued progress in this field by keeping up with emerging ethical issues in medical practice and research.

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Milestones in Ethical & Professional Development

- Medical Ordinance of Sri Lanka - 1927
- Formation of Ethics Committee SLMA – 1992
- Formation of Ethical Review Committee – 1993
- SLMA Declaration of Health – 1995
- Ethical Criteria for the Promotion of Medicinal Drugs and Devices in Sri Lanka SLMA – 1996

Declaration of Health

People have the right

1. to live that they can enjoy in good health and with dignity;
2. to live in an environment free of pollution;
3. when ill, to be treated always with care and compassion, by the attending health professionals in particular and by the members of society in general; and
4. to expect that fees that are charged from patients and other users for services rendered are reasonable.

5. Receive relevant information on matters concern-ing health and health services, such as:
   - facilities available for the promotion of health, prevention of diseases and their treatment, both in the public and private sectors, at regional and central levels;
   - the individuals considered qualified by the State to promote health, to prevent disease and to treat the sick;
   - the individuals, institutions and business establishments considered competent by the State for the manufacture, sale and dispensing of medicinal drugs;
   - the functions of qualified medical, paramedical and other health workers in the public and private sectors;

5 Contd.

- the assistance that could be rendered to the sick by lay persons;
- the duties and responsibilities of all persons in the promotion of health and the prevention of disease in the community;
- one's illness, its principal complications, available methods of investigation and treatment, and their advantages, disadvantages and costs;
- medication that is prescribed, (name, cost and significant side effects etc) in a manner that is compatible with established ethical criteria and the capacity of the person to understand;
- research projects concerning individuals or communities;
- the constituents of cosmetics and foods;
- accurate information in media advertisements of over-the-counter healthcare products;

6. be referred to an appropriate professional or institution when referral is indicated;
7. be afforded confidentiality and privacy during consultation, examination, investigation and treatment;
8. be competently and adequately assessed by their medical professionals;
9. request and to receive a second opinion, when appropriate;
Declaration of Health  Contd.

10. receive, wherever possible, their preferred mode of treatment from among those proven to be effective;

11. keep in their custody reports of investigations pertaining to their illness, or where this is not feasible, a summary of pertinent investigations, together with the diagnosis and treatment; and

12. participate in influencing health related policy.

Declaration of Health  Contd.

People should

13. strive to do everything in their power to keep the environment free of pollution;

14. support all efforts to maintain the balance of nature and its biodiversity;

15. refrain from using, or promoting the use of, toxic substances in the preparation of food and cosmetics;

16. refrain from smoking or chewing tobacco and from abusing drugs and alcohol, and should encourage others to do likewise;

SLMA Ethics Committee

Problems taken up for discussion
1. Inadequate time spent on consultation with specialists

Statement published in news letter
The Ethics Committee wishes to impress upon all doctors the need to conduct their clinics in a fashion that does not discredit the profession.

Respect your patients as human beings who come to you for help be considerate

Structure your appointment system to reflect your actual arrival times and the time you spend with your patients

Your Patients will be grateful

Guidelines on Publicity

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1. A doctor may publish books and articles, write on medical topics in the lay press in one’s own name, and he can also participate in discussions on medical subjects on radio and television provided:

(a) there is no professional advantage accruing
(b) there is no breach of professional confidence
Guidelines on Publicity Contd.

For radio and TV programes

A programe should preferably feature a number of participants

Participants should be from recognized institutions

Names, speciality and professional status of participant disclosed in the interest of authenticity once only at the commencement of the programe.

Other Areas of Activity

Interaction with

- Ethics Committee of the SLMC
- National Bio Ethics Committee
- Ethical Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine

THANK YOU