

EDITORIAL

Conflict in laboratory medicine

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The activities in laboratory establishment are screened by various moral, ethical and legal principles. The primary issues are informed consent, the privacy of the patient and their records, codes of conduct, conflict of interest, laboratory utilization, skill, and direct access testing. These issues are ethically challenging in the ordinary set-up in developing countries like India. The interpretation of the laboratory report and authentication of the same by signatures plays a significant role in diagnosing and managing the patient in the era of evidence-based medicine (EBM).

Recently, several violations of those guidelines by medical professionals with laboratory medicine have been reported around the globe.

Case report¹: *In a complaint to Maharashtra Medical Council (MMC) Mumbai, Dr Prasad Kulkarni identified Dr Sireesha Mohan, a pathologist & Microbiologist. She has multiple connections with private pathology labs located at various places, which makes it impossible for any individual to visit daily. Also, her name and signature is being used for insurance claims and used to allow her scan signature to the pathology labs. MMC has conducted an inquiry and found her guilty and have removed her registration number from the council's register for six months.*

Many other reported cases of violating the existing code of conduct need well-reformed ethical and legal guidelines to curb professional misconduct.

Within the limited resources, the laboratory medicine field contributes a lot in removing the pain and agony from the suffering people of rural India. Therefore, ethics come into force while choosing the services to the patient.

Another aspect is the staff member working in the laboratory. The code of conduct, professionalism, skill hand and good communication of those workers play a lot in delivering prompt services at the needy hours. So, the laboratory staff's perception, knowledge, and attitudes regarding the moral, ethical, and legal issues with the laboratory practice are essential.

Maintaining the lab record and privacy practice is also of paramount importance. The safety measures of the operational staff from biohazard and bio-medical waste management are critical issues.

Therefore, it is exceedingly proposed that understanding ethics helps protect confidence, functional integrity, capability, impartiality, and staff safety. Numerous scientific organizations have developed operational Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) regarding handling ethical issues in those establishments. The defined ethical

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recommendations for clinical laboratories have been developed by the International federation of clinical chemistry (IFCC), the American Association of Clinical Chemistry (AACC) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Those organizations have outlined the responsibilities of laboratory professionals towards their patients, profession and society. Though ethical standards and guidelines vary, the basic principles of ethics are the same to be followed.

Further, with changes occurring in the societal attitude and raw consumerism, each patient should be considered a potential litigant, especially when health care has been declared a service industry that breaks the bond, respect, and trust among the physician and patient. Hence, it is mandatory to incorporate bioethics' core principles and regulations in laboratory institutes.

The laboratory establishment and research involving humans as participants are interconnected by laboratory testing. The issues of handling new results left out biological samples, and genetic testing are governed by many regulations, and those establishments should follow international ethical principles and procedures.

In India, it is mandatory to follow Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines while research is initiated with biological samples or humans as a research participants. The practices in laboratory medicine should be limited defined by law, SOPs and must defend the highest code of conduct in their profession.

The cost of malpractice claims is considerable, both monetarily and impacting the healthcare system. Wary of possible lawsuits, many physicians have closed their practices, stopped performing high-risk procedures, or reduced their care of high-risk patients leading to a situation in which some areas of the country have limited or even no access to medical specialists or critical laboratory facilities.

Turning face to another side, are you ready to face the consequences of poorly trained and skilled health care professionals?

The management should guarantee that no activities that would weaken trust in the lab competence, impartiality, judgment, or functional integrity should be allowed. The administration and professional working should be free from any unwarranted profit-making, financial or other burdens and pressures that may negatively affect the quality of their work. Conflict of interest should be publicly declared, if any. Follow the proper methods to ensure that staff treat human samples left out as per the appropriate guidelines. The maintenance of privacy of the patient and their lab record should also be secured to avoid any unnecessary conflict.

REFERENCES

1. Complaint No. MMC/DC/39/2019/02941-42 18/09/2021. In the matter of Dr Prasad Prabhakar Kulkarni (Complainant) v/s Dr Rajesh Soni Respondent 1 (Reg. No. 2016114737) and Dr Sireesha Mohan Respondent 2 (Reg. No. 63614)

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