



Original Research Article

A KAP (Knowledge, Attitude and Practice) Study on Medico Legal Knowledge among Government Medical Officers in Chitradurga District, Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Forensic medicine deals with the application of medical knowledge to aid in the administration of justice. It is used by the legal authorities for the solution of legal problems, as in cases of injuries, hanging, homicides, sexual offences, infant deaths, poisoning, etc. In short it deals with medical aspects of law. Hence, it is very essential for the medical officers to have thorough knowledge of the subject and opine on cases. With this background the study was aimed to assess the knowledge of medico legal autopsy and various other prospective of medico legal work among government medical officers of Chitradurga districts. A cross sectional survey was conducted during district meeting held at DHO office Chitradurga districts seeking the permission from DHO, Chitradurga. The medical officers were given a questionnaire, containing questions regarding autopsy and other medico-legal work. Most of medical officers have responded for questionnaire and the data so obtained will be analysed using MS excel.

Key Words: Medical officer, District Health Officer, Autopsy, Injury, Crime scene

INTRODUCTION

A medical practitioner will have to frequently give evidence as a medical jurist in a court of law to prove the innocence or guilt of an accused, or to authenticate or disprove a criminal charge of assault, rape or murder brought against an individual. A medical practitioner must remember that his

responsibility as a medical jurist is very great, for every often, his is the only reliable evidence on which the liberty or life of an individual depends. Therefore, the medical practitioner has to acquire the habit of making a careful note of all the facts observed by him, and to learn to draw conclusions correctly and logically after

considering in detail the pros and cons of the case, instead of forming hasty judgements.^[1] Nearly 90- 95% of total medico-legal work in our country is in the hands of medical officers and only 5-10% with the medico-legal experts.^[2] It is essential for a medical jurist to have a fair knowledge of all the branches of medical and ancillary sciences taught to a medical student in the course of studies. A medical jurist is often required to invoke the aid of these subjects in the elucidation of various problems of medico-legal interest in the courts of law.^[1]

Many undergraduates and practising doctors are not very confident about performing routine medico legal duties. It is noted that in India, unlike in developed countries, the bulk of medico-legal work is done by government medical officers who do not have a post-graduate qualification in forensic medicine. The judiciary and police often find flaws in the certificates issued by medical professionals.^[3] Judges have often observed that medical officers are not very careful in drawing up medico-legal reports, and consequently, cut a very poor figure as expert witnesses^[1]

Considering the above facts, the study was undertaken to know their perspectives (level of satisfaction and knowledge) and about medico legal work knowledge among Government Medical Officers of Chitradurga district.

METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional survey was conducted during district meeting held at DHO office Chitradurga district, seeking the permission from DHO, Chitradurga. All Medical officers who carry out any kind of medico-legal work and attend Hon'ble courts of law and depose their expert

evidence in matters relating to medico legal cases were included for the study. The medical officers were given a questionnaire, containing sets of questions regarding autopsy, other medico-legal work, their willingness to conduct medico-legal work and to check their level of satisfaction and knowledge. They were informed that information provided by them will be kept confidential, and will strictly be used only for research and evaluation purposes and the results will be used for paper presentation and published only in scientific journals with medical and academic interest. Their expressed and written consent was taken prior to giving questionnaire. Most of medical officers have responded for questionnaire. Total 63 proforma were distributed among all Medical Officers who attended the meeting, out of which 50 (possessing MBBS degree as a basic qualification) responses were received. The results were tabulated and analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is depicted from table 1 that majority of the doctors (66%, no-33) who used to conduct the post mortem had experience of more than 2 years and 88 % (no-44) of the medical officers didn't had an separate autopsy room in their respective hospitals which is one of the major basic requirement needed in the hospital. Only 4 out of the 6 respondents had all the adequate facilities in their autopsy room to conduct post-mortem. Out of the 50 respondents only 8 (16 %) had skilled attender to assist and help the medical officers while conducting the Post Mortem, which would improve the efficiency of the medical officer and reduce the work load on them.

Table 1: working profile of the medical officers.

| | | Frequency | Percentage(%) |
|--|-------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1.Designation | AMO | 11 | 22 |
| | GDMO | 9 | 18 |
| | MOH | 28 | 56 |
| | THO | 2 | 4 |
| 2.Years Of Experience | Less than 2 years | 17 | 34 |
| | 2- 5 years | 14 | 28 |
| | 5-10 years | 15 | 30 |
| | >10 years | 4 | 8 |
| 3. Total number of autopsy done in last 1 year | <5 | 12 | 24 |
| | 5-10 | 8 | 16 |
| | >10 | 4 | 8 |
| | NIL | 26 | 52 |
| 4.Does Your Centre Have Separate Autopsy Room | Yes | 6 | 12 |
| | No | 44 | 88 |
| 5. Does Autopsy Room As All Facilities | Yes | 4 | 8 |
| | No | 46 | 92 |
| 6.DO You Conduct Post Mortem At Your Center Only | Yes | 24 | 48 |
| | No | 26 | 52 |

It is obvious from table 2, that slightly more than half of (54%) Medical Officers are aware of autopsy technique fully while 46 % are not aware. More ever 54% of them don't know what things to be done when they visit crime scene also four fifth (80%) of medical officers are not aware of exhumation procedures, astonishingly about two third (66%) are fully aware of the procedure of examining sexual offense cases.

Table 2: knowledge of medical officers regarding conduction of post mortem.

| | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--|--------|-----------|----------------|
| 1.Are You Aware Of Autopsy Technique Fully | Yes | 27 | 54 |
| | No | 23 | 46 |
| 2.Do You Know What Things To Be Done When You Visit The Crime Scene | Yes | 23 | 46 |
| | No | 27 | 54 |
| 3.Are You Aware Of Exhumation Procedure Fully | Yes No | 10 | 20 |
| | | 40 | 80 |
| 4.Are You Fully Aware Of The Procedure Of Examining Sexual Offense Cases | Yes | 33 | 66 |
| | No | 17 | 34 |

Table no 3 shows that 84% (no-42) of doctors have the opinion that Conducting Post Mortem at their centre hampers doing clinical work and reason may be their busy clinical work makes them to give less time for Conducting Post Mortem. Majority (96%) of them feel that it's better if the medico legal autopsy was compulsorily carried out by Forensic Expert, as they are not trained enough.

Table 3: Attitude of medical officers regarding post mortem.

| | | Frequency | Percentage(%) |
|---|-----|-----------|---------------|
| 1.Does Conducting Post Mortem At Your Centre Hampers Doing Your Clinical Work | Yes | 42 | 84 |
| | No | 8 | 16 |
| 2.Do You Feel It Is Better The Medico Legal Autopsy Should Be Compulsorily Carried Out By Forensic Expert | Yes | 48 | 96 |
| | No | 2 | 4 |

From the table 4 it's obvious that about two third of doctors will open all 3 cavities in all cases of autopsy (72%), Visit crime scene whenever necessary(66%) and write manner of death in post mortem report(74%). Slightly more than half (56%)

of doctors consult any Forensic Expert while giving the final opinion. Maximum of doctors (92%) have not conducted exhumation till date in their service and most of them are doing medico-legal work includingconducting Post Mortem (96%)

examination, also issuing injury certificate (90%). Only two third of doctors (34%) do sexual offense examination and opine. Half of the medical officers (52%) do examine and opine on age estimation cases and

certify but majority (84%) of them are not examining and opining on skeletal remains examination, as those things are referred to Forensic experts.

Table 4: Practice of conducting post mortem by medical officers.

| | | Frequency | Percentage(%) |
|--|-----|-----------|---------------|
| 1.Do You Open All 3 Cavities In All Cases Of Autopsy | Yes | 36 | 72 |
| | No | 14 | 28 |
| 2.Do You Visit Crime Scene Whenever Necessary | Yes | 33 | 66 |
| | No | 17 | 34 |
| 3.Do You Write Manner Of Death In Your Opinion In Post Mortem Report | YES | 37 | 74 |
| | NO | 13 | 26 |
| 4.Do You Consult Any Forensic Expert While Giving The Final Opinion | YES | 28 | 56 |
| | NO | 22 | 44 |
| 5.Have You Conducted Exumation Till Date In Your Service | YES | 4 | 8 |
| | NO | 46 | 92 |
| 6.Are You Doing Medic Legal Work Other Than Conducting Post Mortem | YES | 48 | 96 |
| | NO | 2 | 4 |
| 7.Do You Issue Injury Certificate | YES | 45 | 90 |
| | NO | 5 | 10 |
| 8.Do You Examine Sexual offenses Cases And opine | YES | 17 | 34 |
| | NO | 33 | 66 |
| 9.Do You Examine And opine on Age of The Individual and Certify | YES | 26 | 52 |
| | NO | 24 | 48 |
| 10.Do You Examine Skeletal Remains And opine | YES | 8 | 16 |
| | NO | 42 | 84 |

Table 5 reveals that about two third doctors are satisfied with both the Post Mortem reports used by them (56%) and Injury certificate which they give. Majority (84%) of them are satisfied with the opinion which they give on sexual offense cases and more than two third (66%) are not satisfied with the opinion on age of individual, but surprisingly none (100%) are satisfied with the opinion on skeletal remains.

Table 5: Self perception regarding various report issued by them.

| | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----|-----------|----------------|
| 1.Are You Satisfied With The Post Mortem Reports Used By You | Yes | 28 | 56 |
| | No | 22 | 44 |
| 2.Are You Satisfied With The Injury Certificate You Give | Yes | 30 | 60 |
| | No | 20 | 40 |
| 3.Are You Satisfied With Opinion You Give On Sexual Offense Case | Yes | 42 | 84 |
| | No | 8 | 16 |
| 4.Are You Satisfied With Your Opinion On Age Of Individual | Yes | 17 | 34 |
| | No | 33 | 66 |
| 5.Are You Satisfied With Your Opinion On Skeletal Remains | Yes | 0 | 0 |
| | No | 50 | 100 |

The reason for the above figures may be because of not being trained properly or not witnessed medico-legal cases during their second year MBBS medical course in Forensic medicine subject in which they are going to learn and also not keeping

themselves updated with various aspects of medico-legal service.

The concept of subject of Forensic medicine in India is based upon the pillars of British Medico-legal system. But as the time elapsed their law and legal enforcement systems were developed very fast than us.

They systematically improvised their legal and judiciary system in relation to the medico-legal work.^[4]

There is a need to improve our legal and judiciary system in relation to the medico-legal work. The medico-legal work is in itself a speciality and is supposed to be dealt by doctors having a post-graduation degree in forensic medicine. Unfortunately, due to the non-availability of forensic medicine experts in district hospitals, these duties are being assigned to simple MBBS doctors or other specialists. This is resulting in poor quality of medico-legal services which ultimately affects the outcome of criminal cases. Since the court decides on evidence immaterial of whether it has been given by a specialist doctor or an MBBS one. Often the defence lawyers take advantage of the lack of knowledge of non-specialist doctors.^[5]

Central Medico-legal Advisory Committee recommended long back in 1957 to appoint a Survey Committee on Medico-legal Practices in India. This Committee submitted its report in 1964 and made recommendations for development of infrastructure, creation of separate cadre of Medico-legal Officers at district level, to give incentives and facilities to attract doctors to make career in Forensic Medicine and to do so called dirty work which no doctor is willing to do it with pleasure in the present circumstances. It is very unfortunate that most of the Medico-legal work is done by M.B.B.S. doctors which are of very poor in quality. Even in the eyes of law M.B.B.S. doctors are considered as expert in medico-legal cases while it is not true in relation to other branches of Medical Sciences. The need of society today is to have the medico-legal services from expert like other branches of medical sciences.^[6]

CONCLUSION

1. The study reflects that Medical Officers are not equipped to the required level, with their knowledge of autopsy and other medico-legal work.
2. As a result of which many cases are being acquitted for lack of required evidences.
3. Most of Medical Officers are not willing to carry out medico-legal work as it hampers their clinical work to be carried.
4. Hence, it is recommendable to appoint at least two Forensic Experts at district level and one at the Taluka level to carry out the medico-legal work and to guide other Medical Officers in medico-legal work.

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