



The Perspective of Medical Students to Ethics and Ethics Courses: Malatya Inonu University Medical Faculty

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The objective of our study was to evaluate the perspective of Inonu University Medical Faculty 2010-2011 semester senior students to ethics and ethics courses by conducting a survey.

This study was carried out at the Malatya Inonu University Medical Faculty during April-May lasting a period of two months. As a result of our study, a statistically significant relationship was determined between the students who have taken ethics courses and those with knowledge of codes of ethics. Attending a course on ethics enables medical students to have a knowledge related to the subject thus bringing with it an "Ethical" sensibility resulting in finalizing ethical dilemmas in their career more easily and correctly.

Key Words: Medical Student; Ethics; Ethics Courses.

Tıp Fakültesi Öğrencilerinin Etik ve Etik Derslerine Bakışı: Malatya İnönü Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi

İnönü Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi 2010-2011 eğitim/öğretim yılı son sınıf öğrencilerinin, etik ve etik derslerine bakışları ile ilgili olarak düşünceleri bir anket ile incelenerek öğrencilerin konu hakkındaki görüşlerinin değerlendirilmesi araştırmamızda amaçlanmıştır.

Bu çalışma Malatya İnönü Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi'nde Nisan-Mayıs 2011 tarihleri arasında iki ayda yapılmıştır. Yaptığımız araştırmada etik dersi alanlar ile etik kurallarla ilgili bilgiye sahip olanlar arasında istatistik açıdan anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Etik dersi alan tıp fakültesi öğrencilerinin konu hakkında bilgi sahibi olması "Etik" duyarlılıklarını da beraberinde getirdiğinde, mesleki uygulamalarında etik ikilemleri daha kolay ve doğru sonuçlandırmalarına neden olabilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tıp öğrencisi; Etik; Etik Dersleri.

Introduction

Ethics covers all moral principles and tries to regulate human behavior via advices in line with universal principles. Behaving in accordance with ethical values ensures the distinguishing of wrong and right, good and bad, virtue and shortcomings.¹ Ethical principles are more like advices rather than sanctions. When doctors comply with these principles they do not experience any dilemma in medical applications. Ethical principles are autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice.²⁻⁴ Ethical dilemmas are frequently experienced in many areas such as genetics engineering, carrier mothers in IVF applications, cerebral death/organ donation, doctor/doctor relationship etc.⁵

If there are inadequacies regarding ethics in medical

applications and cases with dilemmas cannot be resolved easily, medical students should receive a serious, diligent and thorough education regarding ethics and ethical principles.^{5,6}

Acting in accordance to ethical principles will prevent both individual and social damages. Prior to their professional career medical students can be informed about "ethics" and "ethical principles" only by the courses they take during their education.

In our study, a statistically significant relationship was determined between medical students who take ethics course and those who are knowledgeable about ethical principles. Attending a course on ethics enables medical students to have a knowledge related to the subject thus bringing with it an "Ethical" sensibility resulting in finalizing ethical dilemmas in their career more easily and correctly.

In a study carried out in America during 1992-1993 on a total of 1853 medical students from either the third or fourth year, it was determined that in practice ethical

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principles were neglected by health personnel at a percentage of 62%. It has been suggested in this study that there are important roles to be played by doctors, teachers and ethics specialists as a precaution to this issue.⁷ In a study carried out by Ersoy and Gündoğmuş (2003) in Turkey, ethical dilemmas experienced by doctors in some cases have been put forth. It is suggested in this study that an education on ethics will ensure that doctors will not face any ethical or legal problem during their careers⁸ In a study carried out by Fawzi (2010) on senior medical students in Egypt, it is stated by 56% of the students that ethics courses is a method of solving ethical dilemma faced during medical applications.⁹

Materials and Method

After determining that 60 students enrolled to the 2010-2011 academic year at the Inonu University Medical

Table 1. Survey questions.

SURVEY RELATED WITH THE PERSPECTIVE OF SIXTH YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS TO ETHICS AND ETHICS COURSES

These survey questions were prepared in order to have an understanding about the knowledge of sixth year medical students about ethics and their perspectives to ethics courses. This study will be used in a research project. The survey answers are strictly confidential. Do not write your name on the survey page. You are free to participate in the survey. Thanks for participating and answering the questions.

1. **Gender?** Female () Male ()
2. **Age?**
3. I took ethics courses during my medical education.
Yes () **No ()**
4. I think that I made use of ethics courses.
Completely do not agree
Do not agree
Indecisive
Agree
Completely agree
5. I have knowledge on codes of ethics.
Yes () **No ()**
6. Ethics courses are not necessary in medical faculties.
Completely do not agree
Do not agree
Indecisive
Agree
Completely agree
7. Ethics courses are given during the 3rd year at our faculty but they should be in the curriculum of further semesters as well.
Completely do not agree
Do not agree
Indecisive
Agree
Completely agree

Faculty were at their sixth semester, information was requested from students who voluntarily took part in our survey study. The research was finalized within a two month period between April-May 2011. Forty nine students participated voluntarily whereas 21 students did not accept to participate. Of the senior medical faculty students, 19 females and 30 males voluntarily participated in this study. In the study, a survey form of 12 questions was used. The first two questions of the survey are related with the demographic features of the students. The third question and the following questions are related with ethics, codes of ethics and ethics courses. The last three questions ask the perspective of the medical faculty sixth year students to ethics board and ethical consultation. (Table 1). The answers to the survey were statistically evaluated by using “chi square” and “Mann Whitney U” tests. Survey questions have been listed on Table 1.

8. The information given during ethics courses and the moral values that I received from my environment overlap completely.
Completely do not agree
Do not agree
Indecisive
Agree
Completely agree
9. I think that if I try to utilize the information I learned during ethics courses I will face no legal problems and I will be more helpful to my patients.
Completely do not agree
Do not agree
Indecisive
Agree
Completely agree
10. The dilemma that doctors face may be solved more easily if there is an ethical consultation at the hospitals.
Completely do not agree
Do not agree
Indecisive
Agree
Completely agree
11. I am aware of the “Board of Ethics” operating under the medical faculty.
Yes () **No ()**
12. Approval of the Boards of Ethics must be taken for all academic work.
Completely do not agree
Do not agree
Indecisive
Agree
Completely agree

Results

Of the sixth semester students who participated in our study, 19 (38.8%) were female 30 were male (61.2%). The age interval of the students was determined to be 23-28.

It was determined that 29 (59.2%) participants have taken ethics courses whereas 20 (40.8%) have not. It was determined that 30 (61.2%) participants had knowledge on the codes of ethics whereas 19 (38.8%) did not have such a knowledge. Sixteen (32.6%) participants answered the “I think that I made use of ethics courses” as “I agree” whereas 11 (22.5%) have answered it as “I do not agree”. Eighteen (36.8%) participants “did not agree” with the “ethics courses are not necessary” statement whereas 3 (6.1%) “agreed”.

The table below contains the number of senior students participating in our study who have and have not taken a course on ethics during their education

Table 2. Participants who took/did not take a course on ethics.

Took a course	n	%
Yes	29	59.2
No	20	40.8
Total	49	100.0

Ethics course is given to the third semester Medical Faculty students at the Inonu University. It was determined that 20 (40.9%) students “agreed” that ethics courses should be given in further semesters whereas 9 (18.3%) students “did not agree”. Of the participants, 18 (36.8%) students “agreed” that the ethics courses are in compliance with their own moral values whereas 7 (14.3%) “did not agree”. The question asking if ethics courses will be useful during their professional lives or not was answered as “I agree” by 18 (36.8%) students and as “I do not agree” by 6 (12.2%) students.

Fourteen (28.6%) participants “agreed” that there should be an ethical consultation at the hospitals whereas 8 (16.3%) “did not agree”. It was determined that 25 (51%) students were aware that there was a Board of Ethics whereas 24 (49%) were not. It was observed that the question asking if approval of the Board of Ethics is required for academic studies was “agreed” by 16 (32.6%) participants whereas 8 (16.4%) participants stated that they “do not agree”.

A statistically significant relationship was not determined between gender and those who took an ethics course ($p=0.90$, *Yates corrected chi square test*), gender and knowledge on codes of ethics ($p=0.93$, *Yates corrected chi square test*), gender and knowledge of a ‘Board

of Ethics’ operating under the Medical Faculty ($p=0.48$, *Yates corrected chi square test*).

No difference was determined ($p>0.05$, *Mann Whitney U test*) between gender and the medians of scores of age and those who think that they made use of ethics courses, those who believe “ethics courses are not necessary”, those who wish that the ethics course given to third year students should also be in the curriculum of further semesters, those who think that the information given during ethics courses and the moral values that they received from their environment overlap completely, those who think that if they try to utilize the information they learned during ethics courses they will face no legal problems and they will be more helpful to their patients, that the dilemma they may face can be solved more easily if there is an ethical consultation at the hospitals and those who believe that approval of the Boards of Ethics must be taken for all academic work.

A significant relationship was not determined between those who have knowledge on codes of ethics and those who want an ethics course after the third year ($p=0.81$, *Pearson chi square test*), between those who have knowledge on codes of ethics and those who think that if they utilize the information they learned during ethics course they will face no legal problems and will be more helpful to their patients ($p=0.42$, *Pearson chi square test*).

A significant relationship was not determined between those who take ethics courses and those who believe “ethics courses are not necessary” ($p=0.75$, *Pearson chi square test*), those who take ethics courses and those who are aware of a Board of Ethics working under the medical faculty ($p=0.56$, *Pearson chi square test*), those who take ethics courses and those who believe that approval of the Boards of Ethics must be taken for all academic work ($p=0.98$, *Pearson chi square test*).

A significant relationship was determined between those who take ethics courses and those who think they made use of ethics courses ($p=0.002$, *Pearson chi square test*). In addition, a statistically significant relationship was determined between those who take ethics courses and those who have knowledge on the codes of ethics ($p=0.003$, *Pearson chi square test*).

Results and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to analyze the perspectives of sixth year Medical Students at the Inonu University Medical Faculty to “Ethics and Ethics Courses” via a survey and to evaluate the perspectives of the students.

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Doctors should primarily serve all patients equally without deteriorating their current status (*principle of justice*) and to the benefit of the patients and should also inform the patient due to the autonomy of the patient. Important elements such as understanding, willingness, having the ability to give consent should be available during the informing period and the patient should decide about the treatment without any influence (*enforcement, pressure*).^{2,10}

One of the basic principles of ethics, nonmaleficence can be evaluated together with the principle of beneficence. Being beneficial to the patient first and foremost means nonmaleficence. In order to be beneficial to the patient all types of maleficence should be eliminated and that which is beneficial should be facilitated. In addition; a person's fame, property, privacy and freedom should also not be harmed. The treatment offered to a patient should have the maximum beneficence and minimum or no maleficence.^{2,11,12}

If medical students take ethics courses during their education and apply these principles in their professional lives they will solve the dilemma they face during their career much more easily.

In this study, a statistically significant relationship was determined between those who take ethics courses and those who think they made use of ethics courses ($p=0.002$, *Pearson chi square test*). If the influence of ethics courses is utilized in the practical applications of medical doctors, many cases with an ethical dilemma will be easily solved.

A statistically significant relationship was determined between those who take ethics courses and those who have a knowledge on the codes of ethics ($p=0.003$, *Pearson chi square test*). According to this statistically significant relationship that we determined in our study, we may conclude that taking a course on ethics will require knowing the codes of ethics and maybe applying these principles.

According to a study carried out in America during 1992-93 on third and fourth year medical faculty students it is believed that there is a 62% erosion or loss in the codes of ethics. It has also been emphasized in this study that as a precaution doctors and ethics specialists have a lot to do.⁷

The study carried out by Ersoy and Gündoğmuş (2003) in Turkey mentions some of the ethical dilemma that practicing medical doctors face. In the same study it has been stated that ethics education will prevent ethical and legal problems during the professional careers of medical doctors.⁸

The study carried out by Fawzi (2010) on 80 senior medical faculty students in Egypt puts forth that ethics courses can be considered to be a method in solving the dilemma that are faced in medical applications.⁹

Forty nine senior medical faculty students participated the survey that we prepared within the concept of this study that we carried out in Turkey (2011) and 18 (%36.8) have answered as "yes" to the question asking whether they think that ethics courses will be beneficial in their careers or not.

The increase of the ethical sensibility of medical faculty students will enable them to act more professionally when they face an ethical dilemma during their professional lives. Informing students about the solution of ethical dilemma for various cases may contribute to the effectiveness of the knowledge given in ethics courses.^{5,6}

In a study carried out by Donnie et.al. in America (1989-1992), it has been concluded that using films in ethics courses and commenting on the cases after watching the film is a good method for the understanding of ethics courses.¹³

In addition, having a Board of Ethics in hospitals from which ethical consultations can be received will help in solving the ethical dilemma. In a survey carried out by Schaffner and Nelson in (1999), we see that 92% of the participants want ethical consultation because they think it is beneficial for the patient.¹⁴

In any event, it may sometimes be necessary in medical practice to consult those who are experienced about the subject when faced with an ethical dilemma regarding studies such as genetics engineering, organ transplantation, doctor/doctor relations, doctor/patient relations, beginning and end of life, privacy/medical confidentiality, scientific experiments on humans/animals, academic studies.

As a conclusion; in order to give the best decisions for the patient, to eliminate what is maleficent and to ensure that an equal and autonomous medical service is given to all it is required to educate medical doctors who have taken ethics courses and who have put their knowledge into practice.

Ethics and codes of ethics should be carefully and thoroughly taught to medical faculty students. In addition, the sensitivity of the teachers and the doctors who work at the clinics towards ethical dilemma will also be beneficial for the medical faculty students.

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