Review Article

Surgical Ethics In Ayurveda – A Review

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Abstract
Ethics constitute an integral part of medical and surgical practice. Surgery’s mainstay is the operative training, specific mindset of surgeon and willingness of the patients. With the increasing consumer’s awareness so many times legal issues related to ignorance or mal-handling of the patient are raised. To avoid such issues one should follow the rules of Good Surgical Practices. In Ayurveda, the model code for practice of surgery has been established. These ethics bound the surgeon to exercise his duties to serve the suffering humanity. Incorporation of ethics, as described in Ayurveda; necessitates the competence of surgeon, getting consent, to develop the virtues of integrity, compassion and self-effacement, to maintain good relation with co-professionals, to abstain from making false claims, advertisements and malpractices. Ayurvedic code of conduct and ethics should be endorsed with zeal in the present surgical practice.

Key words: Surgery, Ayurveda, consent, ethics

Introduction
In the Ayurvedic classics there is no separate section on ethics, but ethical concepts are ever-present and an ethical undercurrent runs through all the texts. To distil the ethical content from these large texts is difficult like extracting sugar from a cup of sweetened milk. One can only attempt to present gleanings from here and there to give a flavour of the ethical spirit.[1] In Ayurveda fraudulent physician was considered as a messenger of death whereas a virtuous physician was revered. In this paper an effort has been done to review the surgical ethics mentioned in Ayurvedic classics.

Historical Background and Importance of Medical Ethics:
Diseases and ailments have afflicted humanity since antediluvian times. Man’s response in treating disease and, on occasion, finding its cause has been synonymous with the evolution of society, no matter how ancient. Therefore, medicine as we know it today is as old as Man, and must have developed with the first awakening of human consciousness, evolving with successive civilizations. It is therefore not surprising that the antiquity and the rich tapestry of ancient India has been long associated with seminal contributions to the development of medicine.[2, 3] Ancient India’s contributions to ethics and surgical training are remarkable and, almost 3000 years later, continue to have great relevance today, given current widespread concerns about the erosion of long-held value systems and cherished codes of medical practice. In this era of enormous technical advances and innovative therapies, the influence and power of crass materialism and rampant commercialization grows ominously. Sadly, the benefits of advanced technology are far from available to all, and the business of health care becomes increasingly venal. Doctors are better informed about their conditions of service and their career opportunities than the rights and welfare of their patients. It is inevitable, under such circumstances, that deviant practices and tendencies will come to taint ethical medical practice and training.[4]

In the recent times more emphasis has been laid on the ethics in medical science. In fact this is the result of Nazi’s atrocities in the name of research. The shocking details of the post Second World war (1939-45) trial of German medical practitioners accused of conducting experiments on human participants without their consent and exposing them to grave risk of death or permanent impairment of their faculties raised grave concern about subjecting human subjects to medical research. This resulted into Nuremberg code in 1947.[5]

In the light of this state of affairs, a review of medical ethics and some principles of surgical training from ancient India may be pertinent. Ethics is an essential supporting discipline in the practice of Surgery. Ethics simply means the rules or principles which govern right conduct.[6] The application of ethics to the situation specific to surgical practice is termed as Surgical Ethics. In the current National Health Policy 2015; professionalism, integrity and ethics constitute the key policy principles. Ethics and surgical intervention must go hand in hand.[7] In Ayurveda, an elaborated description regarding ethics related to medical practice has been given. [8] Surgical ethics are practical tools designed to improve patient care, innovation and research.

SURGICAL ETHICS

Principles of Professional Competence
First and the foremost requirement in ethical surgical practice is the competence of surgeon. Surgical practice should be done only by the competent and qualified person who acts with total integrity and impartiality. The physician/surgeon who has completed the study of the texts, understood the meaning/interpretation (of the precepts), observed the actions (application of therapies and their effects),
made fit (through practical training), recapitulating the teachings of the science always; should enter into the profession.\[9\] Vaidya (clinician) desirous of bringing equilibrium of Dhatu should first of all examine himself i.e. have introspection that weather will he be able to perform the act (of treating this patient) or not? \[10\] Sushruta was the first to emphasize upon practical surgery and has stated that after getting proper theoretical training a surgeon should practice and learn the surgical and medical procedures on particular models. A preceptor should see his disciple attends the practice of surgery even if he has already thoroughly mastered the several branches of medicine, or has pursued it in entirety. A pupil, otherwise well read, but uninitiated into the practice of medicine or surgery is not competent to take in hand the medical or surgical treatment of a disease.\[11\]

**Principles of Regulation of Surgical Practice**

In the field of surgical practice it was mandatory to obtain permission from the king (Raja-anugya). According to Sushruta it was necessary for a surgeon or physician that after having thoroughly studied the subject both by observation and practice, and having attained to that stage of (lucid) knowledge, which would enable him to make a clear exposition of the science (whenever necessary), should open his medical career with the permission of the king.\[12\] It is suggestive of existence of rules regarding control and regulation of medical practice even during ancient times, similar to the registration of the medical practitioners of present days. A physician, well versed in the principles of the science of medicine (Ayurveda), but unskilful in his art through want of practice, loses his wit at the bedside of his patient, just as a coward is at his wit's end to determine what to do when for the first time he finds himself in the ranks of a contending army. On the other hand a physician, experienced in his art but deficient in the knowledge of the Ayurveda, is condemned by all good men as a quack, and deserves capital punishment at the hands of the king. Both these classes of physicians are not to be trusted, because they are inexpert and half educated. Such men are incapable of discharging the duties of their vocation, just as a one-winged bird is incapable of taking flight in the air.\[13\] The Kuvaidya (quack physician/surgeon) thrive due to the inefficiency of the king.\[14\] Vriddha Vagbhatta has quoted that the permission of the teacher (Guru) is an essential prerequisite for a student of Medical Sciences to be designated as clinician (Bhishag).\[15\]

**Principles of Best Possible Treatment Modality**

A physician or surgeon should always thrive to provide the best possible treatment to the patient. The ideal or correct treatment is that which while pacifying a disorder does not excite/produce another one, while that which though pacifies one disorder, yet at the same time gives rise to another one is not correct.\[16\] This is a very important principle that must be kept in mind while managing the diseases.

**Principles of the Informed Consent**

In surgical practice, respect for autonomy translates into the clinical duty to obtain informed consent before the commencement of treatment. The word ‘informed’ is important here. Because of the extremity of their clinical need, patients might agree to surgery on the basis of no information at all. Agreement of this kind, however, does not constitute a form of consent which is morally or legally acceptable. Unless such patients have some understanding of what they are agreeing to, their choices may have nothing to do with planning their lives and thus do not count as expressions of their autonomy. Worse still, if patients are given no information, their subsequent choices may be based on misunderstanding and lead to plans and further decisions which they would not otherwise have made. For agreement to count as consent to treatment, patients need to be given appropriate and accurate information about their condition and the reasons of surgery, proposed type of surgery, their condition, anticipated prognosis after surgery and expected side-effects of the proposed surgery, any other alternative, unexpected hazards of the proposed surgery and the consequences of no treatment at all. With such information, patients can link their clinical prospects with the management of other aspects of their life and the lives of others for whom they may be morally and/or professionally responsible. So, the surgeons have a legal, as well as moral, obligation to obtain consent for treatment based on appropriate levels of information. Failure to do so could result in civil proceedings.\[17\]

Sushruta was well aware about these facts and has given the concepts of informed consent centuries back. In the context of surgical intervention in urinary calculus (Ashmari Chikitsa Prakarana) there is the reference of prior consent of the king or well wishers /relatives of the patient.\[18\] Dalhana has commented that if surgery is done without obtaining consent then surgeon is liable to be punished by death sentence.\[19\] It is the choice of the patient to receive or refuse the treatment. In the context of Moodha-Garbh Chikitsa (treatment of dead foetus), reference of prior consent and permission of the husband/guardian is available.\[20\] Also Vagbhatta has quoted to seek the permission prior to surgical intervention.\[21\] The surgeon must respect the autonomy of patient. Informed consent is the central dogma of surgical ethics.

**Qualities of a Surgeon:**

A physician who wishes to become a surgeon should have introspection. Surgery needs a special framework of mind and body. It is not possible for all the physicians to become surgeon. Sushruta has specially quoted the qualities of a surgeon viz. Shaurya (courageous/boldness), Ashukriya (prompt action), Shastra Taikshanya (keeping the surgical
instruments sharp), Asveda (himself not perspiring), Avepathu (no tremors), Asamamoha (not illusioned/confused). So before embarking on the surgical procedure one should assess himself that is he able to perform surgery or not. **Principle of Responsibility and Execution of full Professional Skill:**

As described in Ayurveda, firstly proper examination of the disease and diseased has been advocated (Roga-Rogi Pariksha). The diseases have been broadly classified as curable and incurable based on prognosis. The wise physician has to act after careful examination. In case of incurable diseases, surgeon has to clearly prognosticate before starting the treatment; ‘Pratyakhyan’ term is used at various places. Physician after determining curability or incurability of the disease, then proceeding with treatment well in time, after thorough knowledge certainly succeeds. The physician treating incurable diseases suffers from loss of wealth, knowledge/learning, fame and gets censure and unpopularity. It has been quoted that the treatment should be continued till the last breath because sometimes even after appearance of Arishtta Lakshana (features of bad prognosis/impending death), the patient survives by luck/ God’s grace. In the modern medical practice also the physician is not entitled to refuse to treat a patient with incurable diseases like AIDS or HIV positive status.

While performing surgery the surgeon should focus on his job and should do the procedure with full concentration. Surgical procedures may be attended with dangers of four different kinds such as those arising from an insufficient or over performance, or from the slanting or oblique deviation of knife or from an act of self injury on the part of the physician. A surgeon making wrong operation on the body of his patient either through mistake, or through the want of necessary skill or knowledge or out of greed, fear, nervousness or haste, or in the consequence of being abused, should be condemned as the direct cause of many new and unforeseen maladies. Care should be taken not to leave any room for the occurrence of those evils in connection with a surgical procedure.

**Principles of Conservatism:**

Ayurveda embarks to refrain from unwanted surgery and to perform the same only when it is absolutely necessary. In Ayurveda surgical intervention has been considered as the last resort when all the conservative measures fail or when the disease is of such type that urgent surgery is required to save the life of the patient. Sushruta says that diseases may be grouped under two broad sub-divisions, such as surgical and medical. Medical diseases are those which can be managed by conservative means (internal or external application of medicines). In surgical diseases various surgical and para-surgical measures are adopted to treat the diseases. But in surgical disorders conservative measures can be applied on failing which one should go for the surgical options.

**Principles of Appropriate Timing of Surgery**

Surgical intervention should be done at appropriate time. This means that one should examine the patient properly then only should decide to operate or not to operate. Surgery done at appropriate time yields best results. In the reference of Vranaashopha Sushruta has said that a surgeon should well versed with the clinical feature of various stages of Shopha so that he can drain the pus at appropriate time when it is well suppured and pus has formed. He who cuts the unripe swelling due to ignorance or who ignores the ripe one (without cutting) both are to be considered as mean fellows and performers of uncertain action. Similarly in the reference of drainage of pus from an abscess it has been said that it should be incised and drained at appropriate time.

**Principles of Emergent Surgeries:**

Most of the surgeries are planned and should be done according to the surgical principles laid down in the texts or as taught by the trainer or teacher. But in emergent and life threatening conditions a surgeon has to take immediate and prompt action to save the life of the patient. In such imminent situations he should not be guided by the rules laid down rather he should take the immediate action as is taken to check the fire of a burning house.

**General Ethics:**

These are the ethical guidelines given in the Ayurvedic texts for every physician and surgeon. Every clinician of any specialty is supposed to follow and obey these principles hence equally applicable to surgeons also. Briefly these are as follows:

**Principles of Limitations of the Practice and Referrals**

Ayurveda as whole has eight branches or specialisations (Ashtangayurveda). From the thorough study of Ayurvedic literature it can be concluded that the concept of specialisation was well developed at that time and there were different expert practitioners of all these specialisations. Informal social recognition of medical specialization evolved before the formal legal system of the present day. The particular subdivision of the practice of medicine into various specialities varies from country to country, and is somewhat arbitrary. The medical ethics bound the physician to practice his skill within the limits of individual competence, has been well described at various places in Ayurvedic literature. One should not enter in the horizon of other speciality and patient should be referred to concerned specialist. In the context of Pakva Gulma, it has clearly been advised to refer the patient to the specialist (surgeon) who is skilled to manage the same. Similarly in the case of Udar-Roga Chikitsa.
Principles of False Claims, Advertisements and Malpractices
The person himself being incompetent but claims to be an expert physician is a vain glorious pretender and has been condemned. The patients should refrain from consulting these type of persons and should never rely on them.

Relationship with other Co-Professionals
The vaidya (physician) should not enter into controversy with other vaidyas, should advise treatment with collective opinion. Consultation with group of vaidyas (physicians) alleviates all the confusions and doubts.

Professional Virtues
Concept of qualities of Physician, attendant, Patient and Medicine has been contributed by Ayurveda for the overall success of medical practice.

To Conduct Research
Success comes to that physician who practices surgical techniques daily. It is duty of Physician to improve his abilities and competence constantly.

To Teach in Accordance with Standards of Intellectual and Moral Excellence
A number of seminars and symposia have been described mainly in Charaka Samhita to clarify, interpret and deduce proper inferences. Forty four terms for debate (44 Vida Marg-pada) have been described in detail in Charaka Samhita. Under various pretexts the basic principles of teaching have been described. In Sushruta Samhita the description of teaching techniques and methods to study the medical science have been given. Practical training (Yoga) to the students of medical sciences to make them competent for the Surgical practice is a great contribution by Sushruta. He is designated as the first medical man who advocated practical study of anatomy by dissection. In Brihat-trayee (Charak samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Astang Hridaya) an elaborated description of ethics related to conduct of teacher and the student has been given. The concept of Tantrayuktik is described for the better and precise knowledge of the texts. A physician who is not conversant with the canons of exposition, though he may be a student of many treatises, will fail to grasp the meaning of these treatises, just as a man fails to acquire wealth when fortune has deserted him.

General Ethical Principles
“Friendliness with all living beings, showing compassion towards the suffering and wishing the happiness of all” is the philosophy of the medical profession which all physicians should inculcate in their life. Compassion for patients is greatest piety, the vaidya (physician) who observes this excels all others. The patient might suspect his own mother, father, sons or relatives but reposes faith in physician, submits himself to him (the physician) and does not suspect him. Hence the physician should protect the patient like his own son. To manage effectively the untoward events and to provide a good peri-operative care, collection of essential materials prior to the performance of any of the eight surgical techniques, has also been described by Sashruta.

Self Effacement
The Surgeon should have the qualities like Sumansa (maintaining good mind), Kalyanbhivyaharen (wishing the good of all in word and deed), Bandhubhuten (remaining friendly with all living beings) and Akuhaka (not behaving like a quack).

In Charak Samhita four basic qualities of the physician have been described viz. Maitri (friendship), Karuna (compassion), Harsha (cheerfulness), Upaksha (indifference and calmness). The physician should be devoted to these virtues. Friendliness and also compassion towards the diseased, deep concern for those likely to be cured indifference to those advancing towards death. These fourfold disciplines/attitudes of a physician have been described. It is further stated that the surgeon should be in easy reach of all people especially the poor, who may not have the courage to come near him if he is bearing gorgeous and wealthy dress. The physician should be careful always in his conduct and behaviour lest he may lose respect and reputation.

High Ideals of Treatment
Charaka has strongly condemned the physician who indulges in to the medical practice just to make money. He has described the concept of Naisshishthik Chikitsa. The supreme treatment is that which is devoid of allurement. One should not take cereals, foods, drinks or money from a patient. Those who trade their medical skill for livelihood; leaving heap of gold aside collect a pile of dust.

Professional Gains / Benefits
Vagbhata has described ‘Adhyya (rich/resourceful/affordable) guna (quality) of the patient. In the literature related to Rasa Shastr ‘Dhanwantri Bhag’ and ‘Rudra Bhag’ have been described for the physician, thereby fixing the gains from the patient and the persons selling medical goods/ drugs. Beyond that fixed limits, nothing should be taken. The evil minded/wicked who does not repay the vaidya in return for being treated by him, the fruits of all his virtuous acts go to the vaidya. Thus the rights of physician has also been given due consideration while describing the professional ethics.

Moral Ethics
The ethical approach of Ayurveda deals with uplifitment of moral character of the surgeon. He should avoid sitting together with women, residing with them, cutting jokes with them, accepting anything given by them except food.

Confidentiality
It is clearly mentioned in Ayurvedic texts that the physician should not disclose the private matters of the patient to anyone else.
Conclusion

Ethics in each sphere of life including medical science are not only important rather essential. An effort to raise ethical awareness in health care should not be an event, but a continuous process. The veneer of civilisation is thin and the atavistic tendencies of man for violence and cruelty are ever ready to burst forth, as happened in Nazi Germany. As the science is advancing there are chances of decreasing moral values also. So, we have to be very careful to inculcate the ethical values amongst the medical professionals particularly surgeons. In strengthening our ethical convictions and practices, we are meeting our obligation to not only the present but also to our past and the future. In Ayurveda great emphasis has been given on the practice of ethics to strengthen the bond of therapeutic relationship between the patient and the surgeon. Ayurvedic code of conduct and ethics should be endorsed with zeal in the present surgical practice. Moral values of Ayurveda are milestones to guide the surgeon of modern times. It is vital to understand the legal and professional importance of surgical ethics and to practice the same at all the levels of medical care. This safeguards the interest of patient, surgeon and profession as well. An ethically designed surgical practice benefits all.

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