

Is unwanted journalism killing medical ethics?



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Dr. Joyeeta Talukdar 8 June 2020 Updated 8 Jun 15037 views

Since Hippocrates, confidentiality has been presented as the one cornerstone of ethics in healthcare. Confidentiality roots back to the respect for autonomy and self-control on information. Respecting patient confidentiality and privacy are considered as the patients' rights. Confidentiality is the key virtue of trust building in physician-patient relationship. In health care settings patient's information should be kept confidential in the professional relationship. A patient may share confidential information (stressful, embarrassing, and harmful) with physician needed to get an accurate diagnosis. This means that there should be a mutual trust between the two; especially when encountered a mentally disordered case.

Now, electronic media and newspapers are one of the daily needs of our lives. They educate us in various ways in our day to day lives. We are dependent to the social media for technology dazzles with the allure of possibilities and positive potentials. However, ethical considerations about data privacy are on a stake with the rising pressure on Media for popularity and TRPs. The Privacy Rule of US in effect from 2003 levies heavy fines and potential crime charges on unauthorized individual health information disclosure. Termed as , “Protected Health Information”, this applies to health information in oral, paper or electronic forums. In India, the Information Technology Rules (IT-Rules) enacted in 2011 as –Reasonable Security Practices and Sensitive Personal Data or Information. The strengthening of India’s data protection law has been an inevitable step towards the right direction and the IT Rules introduced in 2011 defines, ‘sensitive personal data’ where a body corporate collecting sensitive personal data should obtain lawful written consents from the provider. The body should make sure that the data provider/patient must be aware of the fact that such information is being collected and further reasons why such information is being collected. So there is always the prospect of protecting the Patient’s Privacy and Understanding the importance of confidentiality both in Medical as well as IT Forums.

Now the question arises, “Why we are talking about the ethics of Patient’s confidentiality and IT Rules related to patient consent as well?” We all are facing, better to say maximum of the world is going through Covid-19 the pandemic. During this period I came across many news channels and papers are bringing the names of the patients upfront without their knowledge. That is one of the reasons why I thought of writing about the view-point of mine on this aspect for in my almost ten years of work in close relationship with patients I have always tried to maintain this confidentiality. It is important to understand that besides the Health-care professionals communicating directly with patients, writing about them with disclosure of their private lives on social media sites or blogs without their consent is unethical. Additional ethical consideration is required from the patients if one needs to write about them or mention about them in some electronic media or in black and white media.

Covid-19 and the current lockdown situation has created more effect on the mental health of every person in every corner of the country in one way or another, either financially, mentally or physically. The people are in the fear of death with an uncertainty to future giving them more anxiety perplexes. In this moment instead of advertising the horrific lives of the patients and their suffering there should be more scientific inclusions to make them come out of these situations. These are the one of the most difficult times for all of us as we hear about the spread of COVID-19 from all over the world, through social media, newspapers ,television and from other resources. The most common emotion faced is FEAR followed by ANXIETY and PANIC ATTACKS.

A previous survey during 2013 showed that many a times Social media may lead to (mis)information overload which in turn may cause mental health problems. World Health Organization (WHO) also have pointed out that too much of social media may fuel to stigma that are one of the underlying drivers of fear and anxiety. We need to understand that bringing these patients or the sufferers to highlight with their identities can give rise to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can be a great treat to their after-lockdown life. This outbreak had caused mental health problems amongst public of CHINA, Japan, medical workers of Wuhan and even there are increasing mental health cases in India as well. Hence, we need to understand that as a culture we have been seduced by technology but we must be aware how much our privacy has been taken for granted and the after life of all of us shall be in stake if these are not taken into important concerns. Henceforth, it is very important for the next implication to combat with, “infodemic” by monitoring and filtering the unrequired information which can be a threat to the personal life of anyone including patient and public and to promote accurate information through cross-sectional collaborations.

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