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Medical Ethics and Etiquettes described in Classical Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a science of life with a holistic approach to health. It is one of the oldest medical systems, which comprises thousands of medical concepts as well as detailed description related to medical ethics, social ethics, ethics related to *vaidya*, ethics of treatment of a patient etc. This research article enlightens about the ethics related to *vaidya* and ethics of treatment of a patient. Hence, conclude about 'ethical' aspect of health in classical Ayurveda.

KEYWORDS

Medical Ethics, Etiquettes, Ancient Ayurvedic Literature, PranabhisarVaidya, RogabhisarVaidya



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INTRODUCTION

Medical ethics refer to systems of principles that apply proper conduct and sound judgment to the practice of medicine. Generally, all practitioners are bound by four basic moral principles.

1. The first is respect for a patient's autonomy, which means that individual patients have a right to choose their desired treatment and the freedom to refuse some treatment proposed by a physician.
2. The second principle states that practitioners act in the best interest of their patients, including the choice of treatment, urgency of treatment and general advice.
3. The third ethic is the principle of doing no harm to the patient, and
4. The fourth is justice in regards to the distribution of health products and services to a given population.

While medical etiquette is not written law, it refers to the implied codes of practice for medical practitioners to behave in ways deemed socially acceptable¹.

The importance of an ethical basis for medical practice has been emphasized in recent years. But, when we study Ayurveda, we come to know that it contains elaborate description related to medical ethics & etiquettes. The physician of ancient India were held to the highest

ethical standards of those days and were bound by a strict code of conduct.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1) To study ancient *Ayurvedic* literature w.s.r to medical ethics and etiquettes
- 2) To find out whether an ethical aspects related to practice of medicine, described in *Ayurvedic* literature or not.

METHODOLOGY

The work has been carried out in following phases-

- 1) **Phase I** -Collection of the material & Conceptual study- For this study, the basic and conceptual materials have been collected from the CharakSamhita, SushrutSamhita, AshtangSamgrah, KashyapSamhita.
- 2) **Phase II- Critical** study (careful examination of text and understanding it) is done.
- 3) **Phase III** - Conclusion is drawn.

DISCUSSION:

As per Ayurveda, the structure of treatment rests on four strong pillars i.e. *bhishak* (physician), *dravya*(drug) , *upasthata*(attendant) , *rogi* (patient), which if endowed with qualities leads to alleviation of disorders². Amongst these



the *bhishak* (physician) is the main/principal support².

Qualities of a Vaidya (Physician)-

In Ayurveda, a lot of importance was placed on the acquisition of good qualities by a physician.

According to Charakacharya, excellence in theoretical knowledge (*shruteparyavadataatvam*), extensive practical experience (*bahushodrishtkarmata*), dexterity (*dakshyam*) and cleanliness (*shaucham*) - this is a quadruple of qualities of a physician³.

In Vimanasthana of CharakSamhita, Charakacharya has repeated above four qualities of vaidya. Along with these qualities, he also stated skill (*jithastata*), possession of equipments (*upakaranvatta*), normalcy of all sense organs (*sarvendriyopapannata*), acquaintance with human constitution (*prakritigyata*) and knowledge of the course of action (*pratipatigyata*)⁴.

In context of a person who deserve to hold the degree of Vaidya, Charakacharya states that , the person who has the quality of learning(*vidya*), rationality(*vitarko*), specific knowledge(*vigyan*), memory(*smriti*), devotion(*tatparata*) and action(*kriya*), nothing remains unachievable for him. Further he says that, learning(*vidya*), wisdom(*mati*), practical

knowledge(*karmadrishti*), continuous practice (*abhyas*), accomplishment/success in treatment (*siddhi*) and dependence on experienced preceptor (*aashray*) - out of these even one quality is sufficient to give significance to the degree of 'Vaidya'⁵.

According to Sushrutacharya, ideal vaidya should have studied the subject with its inherent ideas(*tatvadhigatshastrartho*) , done practical work himself(*drishtakarmasvayamkriti*)), be of firm hand(*laghuhast*), cleanliness(*shuchi*), courageous(*shoor*), possessing all equipment and drugs required(*sajjopskarbheshaj*), having presence of mind(*pratyutpannmati*), be wise/ ingenious(*dhiman*), skillful(*vyavasaayi*), well-versed(in precepts and practice)(*visharad*) and devoted to truth and virtue(*satyadharmaparo*)⁶.

In KashyapSamhita also qualities of vaidya has mentioned as- the vaidya should also have received the knowledge judiciously, he should be sober, skillfull, devoted to compassion, donation and modesty, worshiper & follower of divine powers, brahmanas, teachers and other experienced persons, expert in treating complications one by one, free from fear, greed, confusion, anger and falsehood, not doing back-biting, not greedy for wine,



free from addictions and having cheerful personality⁷.

According to AshtangSamgrah – The vaidya should also be impenetrable, strict but affable/ courteous, knower of pulse of time and economics, having received permission of his teacher⁸.

Royal Vaidya (Physician)-

Charkacharya says, The vaidya possessing knowledge of all the four i.e. etiopathogenesis (*hetu*), clinical features (*linga*), cure (*prashaman*) and prevention of recurrence of disease (*roganamapunarbhav*) is fit to be appointed as royal vaidya⁹.

According to Sushrutacharya, The vaidya expert in both i.e. theory and practice is eligible to become a royal physician¹⁰.

Qualities of a surgeon-

Sushrutacharya has elaborately described about the quack surgeon and an ideal surgeon as below-

The one possessing knowledge of only scriptures but untrained in practical work gets confused while facing a patient like a timid/ coward man in the battle field¹¹. On the other hand the one skilled only in practices with no theoretical knowledge treats the patient very boldly, he does not get recognition in the elite and is even liable to be awarded capital punishment by the king¹².

Above both type of surgeon are unskilled and incapable in their job possessing half knowledge either theoretical or practical like a bird with a single wing, thus incapable of flying¹³. The one expert in both theory and practice and intelligent is capable of accomplishing his object like a two wheeled chariot carrying on its job successfully in the battle field¹⁴.

Qualities of an obstetric surgeon-

According to Charakacharya and Vriddhavagbhata, an obstetric surgeon should be the person who has seen the procedure earlier^{15,16}.

In Bhavprakashsanhita also qualities of an obstetric surgeon has elaborated as- the one who has conducted number of difficult deliveries during emergency thus has attained good fame in this procedure, has command over instruments, scripture with its detailed or hidden meaning as well as in discussions (to defend her act if needed)¹⁷. And who has light hand (*laghuhasta*) and is bold and fearless (*bhayojhita*)¹⁸.

Types of Vaidya (Physician)-

Charakacharya states that, there are two types of physician, the one *pranabhisara*- who is a promoter of vital breath i.e. life and destroyer of diseases and the other promoter of disease and destroyer of vital breath i.e. life known as *rogabhisaravaidya* (physician)¹⁹.



Characters of Pranabhisaravaidya (physician) -

The Pranabhisaravaidya knows in depth about all ten seats of life (*dashpranayatan*) or vital parts, sense organs, consciousness and root of consciousness and diseases²⁰. A physician devoted to these four- i.e. scriptures, understanding, application and practical experience is known as one who promotes life²¹.

Characters of Rogabhisaravaidya (physician) -

Rogabhisaravaidya (physician) i.e. promoter of diseases and destroyer of vital breath, hidden in disguise of a *vaidya* tortures the people like thorns. These traitors move around the world due to carelessness of state. These are just opposite to *pranabhisara*²².

Characters of Rogabhisarasurgeon-

Sushrutacharya states that, when the physician performs surgical operations improperly, due to either ignorance, greed, inciting words of others, fear, delusion (confusion) or any other factors, then he creates many other diseases²³.

Disciplines / attitude of a vaidya-

Friendliness (*maîtri*) and compassion towards the diseased (*karunyamarteshu*), attachment to the remediable (*shakyepriti*) and indifference to those who are moving towards
end (*prakrutistheshubhooteshuupekshanam*

)- this is fourfold attitude of the physician²⁴.

Self assesement by a vaidya-

Charakacharya states that *vaidya* should assess self, as he states the *vaidya* desirous of bringing equilibrium of *dhatus* (body elements) should first of all examine himself i.e. have introspection that whether will I be able to perform the act (of treating this patient) or not²⁵?

Conduct/Behaviour of physician towards patient-

According to Charakacharya, the *vaidya* should consider his patients like own sons and protect them sincerely from all the trouble/ miseries, wishing excellent piety or remembering his own knowledge and virtue²⁶.

Sushrutacharya states that, the patient might suspect his own mother, father, brother and sons, but confides in the *vaidya* surrendering himself without suspicion, hence, the *vaidya* should protect the patient like a son²⁷.

In KashyapSamhita also, it is stated that the *vaidya* should have brotherly feelings for everyone (patient)²⁸.

Vridhavagbhat states, the *vaidya* should treat / care the orphans/ helpless patients like own son²⁹.

Conduct/Behaviour of physician towards female patient-



The physician should neither receive any gift from any woman in the absence of her master (husband/guardian) nor talk to her in secrecy and also avoid creating jokes with her³⁰.

Professional secrecy-

The physician should not reveal to others such facts of which the patient feels shy (or is ashamed of)³¹.

Punishment for physician (Punishment for Professional negligence)-

The physician, who is conversant with the science but not skilled in his work, gets delusion when he approaches the patient, just as a coward in a battlefield. He, who does his work with audacity without the knowledge of science, does not get respect from the wise and deserves the penalty of death by the king³².

Other ethical points for a *vaidya*-

- Charakacharya states that, the one aspiring to become *vaidya* should always make all sincere efforts to acquire good qualities so that he becomes life giver to human being³³.
- In concern with discipline of doctors, Sushrutacharya has stated that nails, hair should be cut short and his dress up should be white³⁴
- There are specific instructions regarding the conduct to be followed during a home visit. When a doctor visits the patient in his house, he must be

respectful and dress appropriately. He should focus on curing the illness and refrain from discussing domestic affairs or from announcing the impending death of a patient³⁵.

- Taking permission before practice :Sushrutacharya states that before starting the practice, one should take permission of King (Head of the state/ nation)³⁶.

CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that, the Ayurveda, the traditional Indian medicinal system, known to be a complete medical system, that comprised of physical, psychological, philosophical, spiritual aspects of health, also has elaborate 'ethical' aspect of health i.e. code and conduct of physician, qualities of good physician and quack, professional secrecy, professional negligence, behavior of physician with female patient, and other medical ethics.



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