



Medical Technology: New Ethical and Social Issues

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Abstract:- Revolution in the world of technologies in general and medical science in particular enhanced and change the value of patients life care completely, but on the other side divergent moral problems have raised in the health care field and are not less than a challenge before a physicians and ethicists to decide what are the most favourable benefits that would be provide to the patient during the treatment process. The right to life and human dignity would not be violate is the question which is under the focus of medical technology. While dealing with those ethical problems, social issues also arise which are considered serious threats to the social setup of a multi faith based society, family lineage and dangers to integration of the society too? On one hand medical technology improves the quality of life, like life prolong treatments and lifespan enhancements but on the other hand its brings up with certain un-avoided dangers too which are very harmful while implement in societies. This paper explores the divergent ethical considerations raised by advanced medical technology.

Keywords:- medical ethics, human dignity, treatment, patient, medical technology, physician, society, right to life, no harm, benefit, life support system, ethical considerations

Introduction:- Medical science since ancient ages is serviceable to mankind by dealing with the beginning and end processes of human life and always try to provide benefits to the mankind time to time in general by using new technological approaches in the process of treatment. Medical ethics is developed as a discipline and working like a bridge between theoretical bioethics and the bedside. The goal is to improve the quality of patient care, while improving the quality of life certain ethical problems rise in medical practise. The researchers and ethicists keep themselves busy to find out the solutions of newly raised ethical issues by the advancement of medical technology and are necessary to be addressed, while dealing with such issues of patient care; the emergence of Ethics came into play in medical science. Ethics has been an integral part of medicine since form the time of Hippocrates. Ethics is a concept of right and wrong actions performed in one's life.

Different schools of Ethics have posed different views about this good and wrong notion. Every school primarily focussed on its own principals like Utilitarianism or consequentialism, deontological school, emotive school, virtue school and casuistic school. Among all these schools of ethics, medical science uses mainly the principles of two schools particularly one is utilitarianism and deontological theories while taking the decisions in heath care setting.

The main principle of utilitarian school is to maximum pleasure and the avoidance of pain and the main principle of deontological school is duty or obligation. While during the practice of medical care, ethics is not all alone in the field, but law, finance and human rights have



accompanied to maintain the dignity and avoid violations to patient's life. During the treatment, the practitioners must not violate the laws which are formed by different world medical association for the betterment of patient's life. To safe guard the human life, the medical code has been introduced in medical care system to guide a practitioner for proper conduct while practice in clinics. These codes were first introduced by the Greek medical practitioner namely 'Hippocrates' in 5th century B.C, and the code is known as "Hippocratic Oath". Since then the concept medicine regarded as a profession and Hippocrates as the father of medical ethics. He mentioned several points in his oath which are made to provide maxim benefits to the patient in health care process. Further this code has gone through certain amendments in 1948 by world medical association and a new version of declaration has been framed by 'international code of medical ethics' after the world war second, when a group of German based physicians conduct research trials on human subjects without their informed consents, who were war prisoners and treat them as their own property and ruthlessly vivisect.

The main points which are mentioned in oath are to provide 'do no harm' to the patient and keep their record confidential and as per the professionals ability to save the life of the patient. On this basis medical practitioners commence his/her practice. A principle based approach also has been developed to guide the physician by 'Beauchamp and Childress' in 1979, to fair and equitable distribution of medical benefits by way of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice.

In ancient times, the treatments were of traditional type and professional has not faced so much ethical problems. In that time the risk factor of death was very high, as now in the modern age of science. The practitioners have now best and modern techniques of treatments to cure patients and it became possible to make life less risky especially at the time of illness. A number of ethical questions have raise before the ethicists and practitioners of the world regarding the treatment to the patient and how to maintain the dignity of human life is a big question mark. The use of these innovative techniques of medical science is beneficial to life at large, but on the other hand, its negative effects on the health of the patient cannot be ignored at any cost. Human life is having an inherent value and that value must not be violated unnecessarily without benefitting to him. Various ethical problems have been raised and demand proper attention from all over the globe. Juengst an ethicist is rightly observed that "*some technologies should at least raise certain red flags before we embrace them we draw these social lines around ourselves*".

The ethical issues like organ transplantation, organ donation, euthanasia, abortion, assisted reproductions, genetic engineering and cloning are prone areas of ethical concern in the 21th century. In these issues law plays an important role, while treatment to the patient, the professionals follow the laws already formed by the medical associations of the world and make comprehensive changes from time to time so that the dignity of patient would be safe. Medical science does not use static approach in treatment process, but make continuously changes in its approach of treatment because of use of new advanced technologies in health care field and certain moral questions are rollout and are really difficult to answer them and these ethical problems are multidimensional in nature. Organ donation is one of the burning and mostly debatable issues in today's world; it is considered as a profitable trade of organs particularly of



kidney and people are not hesitating to sell their body parts only for the sake of money. It is anti natural and unethical process and violates the norms of life. Mans intervene into the natural process and procurement of human organs and it is not wrong in saying that it is a practice of blasphemy or playing God act? It is like that human beings in particular other beings in general, the dignity and values of life has decreased and just like other commodities, organs are easily available in the market places. This intervene in nature by man disturb the social order and human race of the societies completely.

There are certain other ethical problems like euthanasia which are unsolved yet and need to be solved first, because the ethical problems in euthanasia have taken precedence over all other issues of medical ethics in the western countries particularly and various countries have given green signal to make euthanasia legal. Euthanasia means a 'mercy killing' or 'easy death' which can be occurred by two ways one is to induce a toxic substance into the body of a patient by the physician to hasten in the process of death which is also known as (active euthanasia) and the other way is to stop the treatment intentionally of the patient and the result is the death of the patient is known as passive euthanasia. In both the cases the dignity of life is at stake, life is considered as a gift given by nature so no one is allowed to take any body's life and if do so that would violates the human rights in a narrower sense and dignity of life in a deeper sense. The implication of euthanasia in the different faith based societies violates the law of religions which consider the human life sacred hence it is unacceptable to societies religiously and morally.

Suppose 'To save or let die' the question here is that to who we shall save and to who we allow to die. What are the grounds on which life is to be saved or left to die? A life would be saved if it is meaningful. What to do when life is not meaningful in terms of dependent on others in performing their activities normally, but one thing must be remembered here that life have an intrinsic value as well before, the patient allowed left to die in a natural way . The example like brain dead patient, should he allow to die so that nature play its part in death, or to put the patient on ventilators (life support system) left to bear more pain is it justified, these are the big question mark before the authorities to solve? Now here the question of cost-benefit and risk- benefit factors cannot be ignored while in the process to save or let die and other aspects are also have to under consideration too.

Role of Physician in Decision Making

Best results would be carried out only when there is a health relationship between the physician and the patient .The rights of the patient should be respected and professional have the duties / obligation that have to be perform mandatory. Truth telling to doctor and receive information of medical records is right and duty of the patient and physician has a duty to discuss risks, costs of treatment, benefits and alternatives should be available to patient for other options independently so that he should be free to accept or to refuse of recommended treatment. Patient should be assured that respect, dignity, responsiveness, timely attention and confidentiality would be maintained. Physician may not terminate the treatment of the patient to a longer time unless new arrangements of care would be available. Physician is a trustee of his patients and his



primary responsibility is patients cure and must not be compromised for his personal interests and not to treat them as a means to benefit third parties like pharmaceutical companies to test their drugs on his patients and receive honours and gifts, is against the ethics of care and instead physician keep focus on patients welfare and autonomy and most important is 'care'.

Cost benefit and risk benefit factor

Case; A two year old middle class child is admitted in the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) with major illness like coma (persistent vegetative state); the Doctor after examining the patient and suggest his family for major surgery, which takes a huge amount of money and after surgery the child would be minimum chance to recover. On one hand money spend on patient is a huge amount but benefit is minimal that means the risk to life is more than to benefit when go through by surgery. The life support system prolongs the patient's life which is in no position to survive thereby. The other problem is decision making, the patient is not able to decide what is good for him to live or to die and the patient have not give his informal consent before. In this situation who decides instead of the patient, the doctor or the family, is another important question to seek answer? To take any such decision, patient is the alone authority to decide according to the new regulation by different medical bodies or the physician would work out his traditional approach 'paternalism' in these circumstances to carry on. As per the consent is concerned, it is a legal way to intervene for further action and does not violate the right to life. In this situation social factor plays a vital role also.

Enhancement of medical technologies leads to a social problem

The social context is also counted as an important concern of the medical ethics problem which can be erupt in society by the use of various new medical technologies like genetically enhanced children, test tube babies etc. Of course they are used as advanced medical technologies in the present world but in future it would draw certain social lines and will be proved a totally different scenario in the world. A little section of society have enough sources to access these highly priced treatment to make life better-off, but the majority around 70% of population in the world are have not's and cannot access them and would be considered as inferior beings and treat them as slaves and a new kind of thinking would be developed among in societies is 'inequality' and the consequences developed by this feeling is not mere a threat or challenge to face, but equally as a moral problem and it directly attacks the integrity of the societies and chance of serious dispute would be erupt in future decades among societies.

Conclusion

There is a fact in saying that human being has been benefitted by various ways by medical science such as less disease, longer life, less suffering etc, with all these benefits medical advancements have also opened the door to new ethical responsibilities as well. The researchers found new drugs and treatments, but on whom they would be tested first without the informal consent (a main tool to intervene) and what kind of risks would patient face? The implementation



of such drugs and treatments put some severe affects on life of patient and in societies which lead to the violation of right to life and the outcome of such new tests of medical science would be lead to moral and social problems like disintegration of society with respect to haves and have not's. These are some unanswered questions that play a very important role in clinical concerns.

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