



# Unethical Practices in Healthcare Sector

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## Abstract

*During recent years health care sector has experienced major issues and scams which has led to the downfall of this vital service sector in terms of quality and consumer confidence. Despite the measures taken by the health department in eradicating scams and hazards, unethical acts continue to perform which dilutes the image of the sector. Lack of training of staff results in wrong medication, and sometimes over medication. Even Doctors are compelled to make patient undergo a large number of costly tests, as the Private Hospitals have adopted the policy of 'market economy'. COVID era has seen maximum number of unethical practices such as increased prices of hospital beds, high cost medicine bills etc. This has been a period where the patients were exploited for generating high revenue during the pandemic period.*

## Introduction

“An apple a day keeps the Doctor away”, we have all believed in this statement since ages. But now the scenario has changed, apples and many other fruits have been injected with harmful chemicals and foods are adulterated. . Therefore, we're forced to visit a doctor whenever we're ill and it is sad that the doctor himself is not being ethical,

driven by market economy to increase income and profits. Doctors were called as God and Goddesses. But now it is contrasting what people think about doctors, some call them frauds and unethical. It is the healthcare institutions, managed as businesses, are responsible for this, and the management of the healthcare institutions are for making high profits nowadays. Healthcare institutions

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have become business for profits and they are following unethical practices to earn money like organ trafficking, phantom billing, over charging of fees, false prescriptions of medicines, etc. The most recent scams done by healthcare institutions are during COVID-19. Hospitals never allowed family members to know the status about the patient, over hyping the requirement of ventilators, and charging high costs on vaccinations. The most horrendous part in this was that some politicians alleging each other in this scam, as they were also a part of this unethical work, this was known in the investigations in later days.

### Healthcare Sectors and their Unethical Practices

As mentioned above there are several types of unethical practice in the healthcare sector. Some of these are explained below in detail, based on research done by the authors.

1. **Fake Scare** – when the hospitals get the right opportunity to make money, they scare the patient and the family members, to make them immobile and make them stay in the hospital for some more time.
2. **Unnecessary Risk** – Doctors are forced by the hospital management to reach the revenue targets. So doctors force the patients to get unnecessary surgeries done, even simple surgeries like tonsillectomy or appendectomy can present the patient with unforeseen risks<sup>(1)</sup>.
3. **Unethical hospital billing** –
  - **Upcoding**- this is overbilling or overcharging, this happens when a patient is charged up and above the required, for the service.
  - **Duplicate Charging** – this is also a type of Upcoding, but in this method hospitals double charge the patient on the same service. This is difficult to find out as hospitals give a large detailed billing and it is difficult to catch hold of these type of scams.
  - **Phantom Charging** – this is charging a patient for whole different service than what was rendered.
  - **Incorrect Quantities** – this is done by charging a patient, higher quantities of medicines than what was given<sup>(2)</sup>.
4. **Negligence and Medical errors** by Nurses and other staff. These are that most common causes of patients not getting cured, becoming more critical and even deaths. Several millions of patients die globally including in India due to human errors. Mistakes occur not only due to negligence, complacency, but also because of poor skills and knowledge, and lack of team coordination and communication during emergency<sup>(3)</sup>.
5. **Lack of Experience** –Hospitals and Doctors allow inexperienced nurses and freshers to work o (administer medicines and treatment on the patients in General Wards. When it turns out into a blunder and casualties, the ultimate sufferer is the patient
6. **Fake Health Certificates** – it is told that a few health care institutions get involved in this type of activities to generate money.
7. **Organ Trafficking** – It is a hurting scenario when we see doctors involved in kidney trafficking<sup>(4)</sup> and since hospital management induce doctors and

concerned staff to indulge in such cruel and unethical practice.

8. **Information Consent** – the hospital management do not pass on the exact information about the patient's condition to the family members until the admission and the payment process is completed.

### **Medication Errors and Four Pillars of Medical Ethics**

Some times mistakes happen due to avoidable reasons such as lack of therapeutic training, inadequate drug knowledge and experience, inadequate knowledge of the patient, inadequate perception of risk, overworked or fatigued health care professionals, physical and emotional health issues and poor communication between health care professional and patient. Such things, although unintentional, are to be considered as unethical. A responsible and ethical management should be aware of these and include remedial measures as a continuous management activity, and uphold the four pillars of medical ethics: (1) Beneficence - The main motive of the health care sector is to do good to their patients in terms of providing quality services, (2) Non- Maleficence- It refers to not harm any human being in any way possible during the rendering of medical service, (3) Autonomy- It refers to the freedom which is to be given to the patient in choosing treatment and services they want to avail and (4) Fairness- The cost and pricing of the treatment should be reasonable and should not be inflated in any process of the treatment<sup>(5)</sup>.

### **Conclusions**

As time passes, the trust between a patient and the hospitals / doctor and supporting medical staff have to grow in a positive way and this should happen by ethical practice by all concerned in providing medical services. There are too many unethical issues and practices in healthcare sectors. Hospital management and doctor/staff, driven by market economy, resort to many unethical practices to increase profits. Some examples are: subjecting patients to all sorts of costly tests, over medication, stay in hospital for longer than required, inflating bills, etc. Lack of training and negligence results in wrong medication and unethical and harsh communications etc. Patients and their relatives are more concerned about the end result being success, namely cure of the patient. Adherence to ethics and values by the hospital management, doctors, and staff with transparent and positive communications will enhance customer satisfaction, and improve brand name of the Hospital and Staff.

We would like to add on to this by saying that not every healthcare institution is involved in unethical practices and making money and profit by evil ways. There are a lot of healthcare institutions that are very much ethical and follow their duties diligently. Government hospitals are focusing towards better treatment and higher quality of treatment at affordable costs. There are many free or low-cost cancer treatment hospitals in India, charitable hospitals, doctors who run small clinics for free of cost, doctors who work only with service motive rather than money motive. Government provides many health schemes and yojanas to the people who are in need.

Still there is need for training doctors, nurses, and other staff in good practices with regard to medical ethics and adhering to ethical values in communication with patients and their relatives, in prescribing only absolutely required tests for diagnosis, and focus on cost effective treatment. Management must check and restrain unethical practices in the above. They must also provide adequate training for doctors and staff on medical ethics and their knowledge in enhancing their knowledge and skills to avoid errors in treatment..

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