Medical Ethics Teaching Reform and Practice in Local Medical University of China

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Abstract. In the teaching reform of medical ethics in local medical university of China, several factors, including simplistic curriculum, large class teaching and the lack of humanistic quality among professional teachers significantly influence teaching outcomes. But the new teaching idea that targets clinical application in primary hospitals through the way that teaching practice fits into educational goals has been more and more acceptable. Combined with the teaching reform and practice in Xi’an Medical University, the establishment of medical humanities curriculum system with the reform of medical ethics course as the driving force and the foundation can promote the innovation of medical ethics teaching contents, teaching methods and assessment and improve the professional teachers’ humanistic quality so as play the role of medical ethics course in promoting the development of medical students’ professional quality.

Introduction

At present, training applied talents has been identified as a major task of colleges and universities in China, which seems not only to be an effort and attempt to solve the employment problem of graduates but also be an inevitable requirement of China’s economic development in the period of social transformation. Applied talents, those who can employ objective laws and scientific principles for creating social wealth [1]. The course of medical ethics is very helpful to develop professionalism and ethical accomplishment of applied medical talents. Despite a series of reform and innovation in medical ethics teaching in China, there are still some problems, such as teaching materials lagging behind time, the lack of experiential teaching contents, unreasonable curriculum..., which largely restricts teaching effects. According to the requirements of training applied medical talents, medical ethics teaching reform and innovation has always been our pursuit. This paper mainly discusses medical ethics teaching reform by taking the experience of Xi’an Medical University and some other local medical colleges and universities in China as examples.

Characteristics of Medical Ethics Teaching in Chinese Local Medical Colleges and Universities

Medical Ethics Teaching in Correspondence with Educational Goals of Chinese Local Medical Colleges and Universities

Local medical colleges and universities in China undertake the responsibility to train qualified medical and technical talents for primary hospitals. The training objectives to develop “Four Qualities” of medical and health professionals, namely being devoted, skillful, dedicated,
and excellent, which is obviously different from the training goal, “talents for medical scientific research”[2], of universities affiliated to the Ministry of Education in China. Specifically in the field of medicine, applied medical talents should have a comprehensive command of professional knowledge, perceptions of group prevention and individual treatment, good interpersonal communication and decision-making ability, field survey skills, objective analytical ability in medical practice and evaluation [3]. From the perspective of medical professionalism, this requires that medical education should attach importance to the synchronous development of science and technology education and moral education in order to embody “patient-centered” concept in medical development. Obviously, professional medical education and medical humanities education should be equally important. And both scientific and humanistic spirits are necessary in the process of training medical students. Medical ethics is set as one of the core courses of medical humanistic education. Primarily because the lofty goal is to correctly practice and aim at releasing the threat of human diseases and illnesses with an active scientific exploration and a humanistic and excellent character in the clinical medical study and practice. Secondly, it also plays an important role in helping medical students to establish a correct outlook on life and correct values, to form the rational way of thinking, and to develop their professional ethics quality and clinical ethical decision making ability[4].

**Medical Ethics Teaching Aiming at Clinical Application in Chinese Primary Hospitals**

It is pointed out that in the China's Hospital Accreditation (Trial Draft) promulgated by the Ministry of Health of China, Chinese hospitals are classified into different levels as primary, secondary and tertiary (from low to high) according to their functions and tasks. A large number of medical students from local medical colleges and universities will serve in primary and secondary hospitals. The Guidance on Promoting the Establishment of the Grading System of Diagnosis and Treatment points out primary hospitals are mainly responsible for the treatment and prevention of common diseases. So it is necessary to select carefully the teaching content of medical ethics course and to realize its effectiveness. A large amount of content of medical ethics teaching materials in present use actually covers at the same time many aspects of bioethics, accounting for almost 1/4. And there are a great deal of cases for discussing in the content of bioethics, which plays a valuable role in developing students’ initiative, including ethical issues of assisted reproductive technology, organ transplantation, hospice care and so on.

**Problems in the Teaching of Medical Ethics in Chinese Local Medical Colleges and Universities**

**Simplistic Curriculum**

The focus of medical ethics teaching should be changed from knowledge teaching into ability training to strengthen students’ ability to analyze and solve problems independently, and develop their decision-making ability[5]. Medical students’ humanistic spirit, an important part of medical education, is a more extensive area than medical occupation morality, of which the content is far beyond the scope of the system of medical ethics. In general, the medical humanities curriculum system involves the Introduction to Medicine, Medical Philosophy, Medical Ethics, Medical Sociology, Medical Psychology and so on. However, due to differences in understanding among school administrators, the length of schooling and the
limitations or shortage of teaching staff, there is a lack of the combination and continuity of these courses in most of the local medical colleges and universities in China. On one hand, the amount of courses in medical humanities education is limited. In some colleges and universities, there is even a tendency for these courses to be reduced or cancelled. So there is a social phenomenon: when the society constantly questions the professional ethics of doctors, medical humanities education continues to reduce[6]. On the other hand, most of these courses are set as non-test-required courses, so most of the students think that the importance of such courses is far worse than test-required courses, so that students’ motivation of learning and enthusiasm for these humanistic courses are greatly.

The Limited Effect of Large Class Teaching

Good medical ethics teaching effect relies not only on teaching mode, but active participation of students as well. Generally, in order to achieve the ideal teaching effect on class, a class should be controlled less than 50 students. And the effect of teaching more than 90 students in one class at the same time is being seriously questioned, in which students will only pay their attention to earn credits rather than participation in the classroom. In recent years, along with the promotion of teaching reforms in Chinese colleges and universities, there is a necessity of reducing class hours, which leads to large class teaching in medical ethics courses[7]. So the class hours are getting more and more limited, which is unable to ensure that every student has the opportunity to participate in an interactive session on class so that the final teaching effect is difficult to achieve.

The Lack of Humanistic Quality among Professional Teachers

Generally speaking, there are two problems among teachers in Chinese local medical colleges and universities. One is that some medical professional teachers are not aware of the humanistic factors in medical education so that their clinical case analysis is not reasonable to involve personal bias, which may also cause a certain degree of students’ judgment confusion. On the other hand, current medical ethics teachers in China can be classified into two categories. The first type comes from medical professional teachers who have got some ethics knowledge but not a good command of ethics or ideological education, which to some extent causes a lack of accuracy in ethic analysis of clinical cases. The second type are mainly humanities teachers who have gained some medical knowledge through independent learning without systematic and professional instruction, resulting in difficulties in the analysis of clinical cases[8].

Medical Ethics Teaching Reform

Teaching Content

To make a close combination between medical ethics teaching and clinical practice and to strive to achieve “no gap” between curriculum setting and clinical application, teachers should pay close attention to the domestic and foreign health care reform, new clinical technologies and development of new drugs and medication to get an accurate positioning of teaching content. For students in different majors, teachers should also select different teaching cases according to the need of different selected theoretical content. There should be a certain tendency in the selection of theoretical teaching content in order to make a connection between
what students can learn on class and their majors to achieve the ideal teaching outcome. Some
local colleges and universities do as follows. Beside detailed theoretical instruction, their
teachers also try to make students understand ethic requirements in clinical interrogation,
physical examination and auxiliary examination through role-play and identity exchanging.
Through summary, they find case discussion is popular among students to make a combination
of theory and practice to promote students’ thinking. As for the choice of clinical cases to be
discussed on class, professional consistency should be taken into consideration. For example,
there is currently an extreme lack of organ donors in China, showing the lack of organ donation
ethics. Medical students will be medical workers. So it is quite important to let them have a
correct attitude towards organ donation to promote organ donation work. Thus, medical ethical
problems in reality is an important part of teaching contents reform. In the classroom instruction
of the ethical issues of organ transplantation, it can be combined with specific cases so that
students can think about the possible ethical problems when applying organ transplantation
technology. But to flexibly use clinical cases on class and guide students with rationality
requires teachers to have a wealth of medical ethics knowledge as well as certain professional
medical knowledge.

**Teaching Method**

The reform of theoretical teaching method. Reform of medical ethics teaching method is
based on a good command and a flexible application of the basic theory of ethics. Therefore, it
is particularly important to explain the relevant basic theory on class. The same is true of
training students’ learning and application skills. For example, as for the strong theoretical
feature of the three major theories of traditional ethics including deontology, utilitarianism and
virtue theory, teachers should involve students as active participants by making full use of
various kinds of activities like practical case analysis, on-class discussion, role-play, making
presentations, debate to reduce the time for pure theoretical instruction to stimulate students’
learning interest and to provide students with opportunities to experience and understand the
role of medical ethics in real medical work so as to develop their ability of rational analysis and
problem-solving. In this way, students will gradually form a correct value and outlook on life.
Here is a specific example. In the theoretical instruction in each chapter, students will provided
with an appropriate and related medical film or a television drama with a requirement of
after-class watching and an independent oral presentation about their feeling on class or during
the class break. Again, big class teaching arrangement is not conducive to the participation of
students and teachers’ control, and the improvement of teaching outcomes. In order to ensure
the effectiveness of teaching, some measures should be taken to reduce class size so that there
are more opportunities for students to participate in classroom discussions and more facilities
and a better atmosphere for teaching design.

The reform of practical teaching method. Restricted by conditions and facilities of some
colleges and universities, medical ethics practice teaching in the past were completed mainly by
playing videos or letting students visit different clinical teaching centers in their schools.
However, the effect is not very good due to limited class hours, insufficient materials and poor
conditions. As for this, Xi’an Medical University have redesigned and decorated its medical
ethics teaching center, renamed “Hong De Hall”. As one of the practical training base of
medical ethics, it is the first and only one intramural medical ethics teaching center in Shaanxi
Province. In its exhibition hall, many precious materials have been displayed for students’
learning, involving the deeds of famous experts and talents in both the fields of western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine, the agreements of the donation of volunteer remains to the school, donated volunteer remains and the Oath of Medical Students of the People’s Republic of China. Annually, a large number of medical students are received in Hong De Hall for learning. Materials in the hall are vivid and live textbooks for students to get a real experience which is much more persuasive, effective and significant than pure theoretical teaching. From the current use of Hong De Hall, it has broken through the pure theoretical teaching of medical ethics. Every year when receiving freshmen, graduates are about to leave school or in the training of new teachers, there must be a lesson held in the hall to let them truly comprehend “medicine is a humane art”.

The reform of assessment. In the past, the ratio of on-class performance to final exam results is 3:7 in most local colleges. This ratio is required in all subjects without taking diversity into consideration so as to make the assessment of humanities courses rigid which cannot truly reflect the students’ learning. So Xi’an Medical University has made an adjustment in the assessment of medical ethics course. The ratio of on-class performance to final test results has been adjusted to 4:6. The on-class performance focuses on those showing personal theoretical proficiency and the ability to solve specific problems in on-class discussed and role-play. And the textbook “Medical Ethics Practice Handbook” has been published with the effort of teachers in Xi’an Medical University, which involves the classic books, classic film, wonderful lesson, visit experience, meeting with remains donation volunteers, etc. This promises an accurate and objective score on on-class performance. As for the design of final tests, the proportion of subjective questions has been increased to focus on students’ ability to apply theoretical knowledge into practice through a large number of medical case analyses. This type of assessment, to a certain degree, set the way to improve the students’ understanding of theoretical knowledge, to increase students’ initiative in participation and their interest in reading works of Humanities.

**Strengthen Teachers’ Professional Skills**

“Great learning makes a teacher; moral integrity makes a model.” Teachers’ professional proficiency has a significant function in the process of teaching. “The Opinions of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health on Implementing the Comprehensive Reform of Clinical Medical Education” issued by Chinese government proposes to strengthen students’ professionalism and occupation moral development in order to deepen the reform of the five-year clinical medical education, and to make “the moral education run through the whole process of teaching education” to develop students’ occupation ethics of caring for patients and respecting for life. As for teachers in medical colleges, they should combine their professional knowledge with medical ethics with the awareness of not only teaching, but also educating people.

**Summary**

With the rapid development and active promotion of Chinese education reform, student-oriented teaching mode will be vigorously promoted. It is very consistent with the goals of training medical talents for Chinese local colleges and universities to pay a special attention to medical ethics and its related courses to strengthen the occupation moral education of medical students.
References


