

Observance of ethical codes in selecting supervisor by postgraduate students

Zahra Bayrami¹, Mohammad Abdollahi^{2*}

1.Ethics Committee Secretary, Pharmaceutical Sciences Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

2.Faculty of Pharmacy, Ethics Committee Manager, Pharmaceutical Science Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

***Corresponding author:**

Mohammad Abdollahi

Address: Pharmaceutical Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

Postal Box: 1417614411

E-mail: Mohammad@tums.ac.ir

Received: 10 Jan 2011

Accepted: 07 Feb 2011

Published: 14 Feb 2011

J Med Ethics Hist Med. 2011; 4:1.

© 2011 Zahra Bayrami and Mohammad Abdollahi; licensee Tehran Univ. Med. Sci.

Abstract

Nowadays, with development of medical sciences, several ethical challenges have raised which make research more complicated. Observance of student's right in selecting interested research topic and the supervisor, in addition to its positive effect on the research process, will cause satisfaction and quality promotion in the educational system. To observe that issue, during a confidential survey of a number of postgraduate students in 2009, students were asked to confidentially describe any displeasure they might get during their study and research. The most important items included: imposing thesis by a supervisor without informing the student, compulsory assignment of students to a specific supervisor, little time allocated for students by the supervising team who may be selected without students interests, prolongation of the research time, and non-cooperation in publishing the results.

Establishment of a proper way to transfer student's displeasure or criticism to supervisors and establishing a continuous program for informing research teams including supervisors and students about ethical codes can positively affect the issue.

Keywords: Ethics, Thesis, Supervisor, Doctorate students, Research.

Introduction

Science, teaching, and learning in Iranian culture have always been a prominent interest under consideration of religious leaders, scholars and scientists who have provided the rules and instructions about teaching, learning and related ethical aspects in their writings and books. Among them, Abu al-Nasr al-Farabi (827 CE) in the books "Tahssil Al-Saada" and "Ara' ahl al-Madina al-Fadila", mentions the purpose of education as improving human intellectual and moral virtues,

and making her/him to be effective in prosperity of the society.

Avicenna (980 CE), who is one of the famous medical scientists of Iran and the world and the books attributed to him is more than one hundred (1, 2), has discussed in 16 books that practice and teaching medical sciences is under direct influence of ethics (2).

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (1201 CE) in "Akhlaq e Nasri" has provided opinions regarding the

education, and in another book called "Adab al-Mote'allemin" which has been attributed to him, studied the issue of education in details. This is the first independent book of an Islamic scholar that exclusively discussed the subject of science in terms of characteristics of supervisors and students. Also Shahid E Saani (1505 CE) in his famous book called "Monia Al-Morid fi Adab Al-Mofid va Al-

Mostafid", introduced the characteristics and duties of the teacher and the learner comprehensively. This book is the most complete and detailed book of a great Shiite scholar in the subject of education. He has divided duties of the supervisor and student into three parts, including the relationship between supervisors and students, special duties of supervisors, and special duties of students. Today, some translations and rewritings of this book is available in Persian (3, 4), and such resources can be used to explain the positions and rights of supervisors and students, providing detailed instructions and rules that are compatible with current teaching space in universities and training centers, and even to resolve deficiencies.

In the past, it was common that seminary students were used to select a teacher by themselves, and after a long duration of internal and external searching for this purpose, they had to follow his preferences and guidance directly as a mentor. In the history of culture, art and literature of Islam and Iran, carefulness in selecting the supervisor and then following his instructions and tips, along with politeness and humility for the grand position of the teacher, was guaranteeing the student luck to gain science and literature.

So, since many of the student researches are performed as the thesis under supervision of supervisors, obviously creating a proper and continuous relationship between supervisor and student is necessary for achieving many higher goals of research activities during the period of study. The relationship between supervisor and student is not only a simple consultation and pre-determined duty, but it is a voluntary, consistent, widespread, dynamic, interactive and truly supporting process between an experienced person with beginner and the final purpose is scientific, professional and personality development of the student.

Nowadays, with development of medical sciences, the related researches have become more complex in its various fields. Therefore, consideration of medical and research ethics and clear legislation in different cases, not only help researchers, but also can identify their options and responsibilities as well as other team members, patients and subjects.

Since students, who are doing research and thesis under supervision of an academic member are main participants in many studies, obviously, their interests to research and the topic of the thesis

has a direct influence on the speed and quality of research and moreover, has a great effect on student academic life. This issue is seen in the life of outstanding scientists and professors. Therefore observance of students rights in selecting research topic and the supervisor, in addition to its influence on the research process will cause satisfaction and quality promotion of education in the teaching system. Teacher with all his/her energy and ideas, make a relationship with student, and thus student will receive necessary guidance, support, and encouragement for advancement.

Therefore, in this study we aimed at exploring any closed complaint or displeasure among students in the matter of selecting research thesis and supervisor in a confidential manner and presenting some strategies for improving the situation.

Methods

To realize the problems just in a very confidential manner, a total of 30 postgraduate students in 2009 in the field of Pharmacy or Medicine at the campus of Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS), were asked to give their problems or complaints relevant to the issue of thesis and mainly the supervisor orally. Duplicated or similar comments were classified as a single and general subject. The participants were guaranteed not to be disclosed for their names or specific issues. The points raised by students were examined by authors and solutions to these criticisms were proposed.

Results

General issues that were stated by students were as follows:

1- A person was imposed on the supervisors or advisors team that has not been selected by the student.

2- A person has been added to supervisors or advisors team that did not have effective role in the implementation of thesis.

3- The topic and main idea of the supervisor and student was transferred to another person because of various excuses.

4- The number of supervisors and advisors was six while each student only needed one or maximum two and the rest had no role.

5- Some students complained of disrespecting to them by some department members or even advisors.

6- There were conflicts between department members that resulted in harms for students

7- The students were afraid to complain.

8- Some faculty members did not permit the student to get access to some laboratory instruments.

9- Some faculty members did not devote enough time to answer questions of students and solve their problems.

10- Despite of the existence of research funding, student had to pay for speeding up the process of the thesis.

11- The student was not listed as the first author despite his/her main action.

The above items raised by students were examined by authors and solutions to these criticisms were proposed as follows:

1- Informing faculty members of students' comments and criticisms that were never stated directly by students.

2- Establishing a continuous program to strengthen knowledge and ethical attitude of faculty members (human willingness to learn and improve until end of life).

3- Providing hints for those who do not consider ethical codes in their relationships with students and are known as immoral.

4- Notifying ethical codes to both teachers and students.

5- Full respecting to students and well behaving with them.

6- Having good morals and professional ethics.

7- Having knowledge about ethics and behavior of youth and considering the level of scientific, welfare, and culture of students.

8- Being flexible to criticisms and revising bad behaviors.

9- Being positive, motivate students and not frustrate them

10- Continuously and confidentially reviewing teacher's functions with observance of all ethical codes and maintaining their honor and dignity.

11- No discriminating among students and no wasting their useful time

12- Using the most updated methods, tools and psychological principles in teaching.

13- Observance of principles, standards, work rules and disciplines.

Discussion

Although these issues often are considered and respected by faculty members, but considering the possible issues that cited by the students is effective in promoting current status. Of course, students also have some vices that are complained by teachers and needs attention but they were beyond the subject of this paper.

Every teacher and faculty member is a mentor, and thus it is necessary for them to promote altruism and discussions in addition to scientific knowledge. In other words, supervisors should be powerful innovators in the direction of their scientific activities. Most successful people believe that their successes owe to their teachers and

supervisors, and conversely. Impressibility of the students clearly shows the importance of the role of the supervisors in reforming the society. Thus, fundamental transforms in any society depend on transformation of its educational system. Meanwhile, teachers and supervisors are the main axis of development and evolution as constructors of scientific thoughts, the propagators of social values and deliverer of these values to the students, because the human resources is the first principle in training. Even some considered teachers as educators of human and society, comparing their functions to prophets.

In research ethics some items including observance of patients' rights, data fabrication, data falsification, the other types of plagiarism, and authors rights are considered essential. So far, students rights in taking and passing the thesis has not been seriously considered and it seems necessary for university professors and mentors to respect students rights in the process of getting up to defend the thesis which has not been observed in the regulations yet.

In a planned structure, supervisor and student can establish a strong link, so this relationship would be useful for each of them. In forming this relationship, supervisor is considered as the main mentor and has four roles. First, the teacher as a supervisor may offer help, shows the way and provides appropriate feedback. Second, the teacher as a facilitator gives the student the opportunity to gain new experiences and skills and learns using them. Third, the teacher as a counselor helps students to define their goals and achieve them. And fourth, the teacher as an interface creates effective networks among colleagues, professionals, students, teachers and other deals. In such circumstances, the student can achieve his/her goals in the future. The goal of this relationship is that student reaches a level of autonomy to be able to perform his activities without help of the supervisor, and the most powerful connections are formed when placed under protection by both sides in relation with an appropriate environment, and they receive benefit and appropriate feedback from this relationship.

Conclusion

Observance the students' rights in taking and passing the thesis as an ethical issue should be taken into account to prevent any undisclosed displeasure among students. It is essential to note that expressing the criticisms is only a start point for discussing and realizing the problem, not for approving the problem. Authors of this paper believe that the majority of the academic community adhere to the professional ethics, but observance of ethical codes in this area would increase efficiency of Universities.

Acknowledgment

This article was presented as an invited lecture at the first Annual Iranian Medical Ethics

Congress in October 2010 hold in Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

References

1. Larijani B, Zahedi F, Malek-Afzali H. Medical ethics in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *East Mediterr Health J* 2005; 11(5- 6): 1061-72.
2. Tschudin V. *Ethics in Nursing: The Caring Relationship*. London: Elsevier; 2003.
3. Hodjati SMB. *Teaching and Learning Practices in Islam*. Tehran: Daftar-e Nashr-e Farhang-e Eslami; 2007. [in Persian]
4. Shariatmadari HR. *Regulations to Be a Scientist*. Qum: Dar Al-Islam; 2010. [in Persian]