

Assessing Staff Adherence to Ethical Guidelines in Patient Care: A Multidisciplinary Perspective across Physiotherapy, Pharmacy, Dentistry, and Social Work

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Abstract

Background: Adherence to ethical guidelines is critical in multidisciplinary healthcare settings, where collaboration among professionals from different fields presents unique ethical challenges. This study aimed to assess how physiotherapists, pharmacists, dentists, and social workers in a tertiary hospital adhere to their respective ethical guidelines and to explore the common ethical dilemmas they face.

Methods: A cross-sectional, mixed-methods study was conducted, combining a survey (n=100) to measure ethical adherence across five domains—consent, confidentiality, professional boundaries, decision-making, and conflict resolution—with semi-structured interviews (n=20) to explore ethical challenges in depth. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: Overall adherence to ethical guidelines was high across all professions, with no significant differences between groups. However, qualitative findings revealed challenges in maintaining professional boundaries, ensuring confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and resolving conflicts in multidisciplinary teams. Strong communication and respect for professional expertise were identified as key factors in overcoming ethical dilemmas.

Conclusion: While multidisciplinary teams generally maintain high ethical standards, the complexity of shared decision-making and role overlap presents ongoing ethical challenges. Addressing these requires improved communication strategies, institutional support, and continuous ethics training.

Keywords: Ethical Adherence, Multidisciplinary Care, Professional Boundaries, Confidentiality, Informed Consent, Conflict Resolution, Healthcare Ethics.

Introduction

Ethical guidelines are foundational to the practice of healthcare, ensuring that patient care is conducted with respect, integrity, and professionalism. These guidelines, typically established by professional organizations, outline key principles such as autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and confidentiality. Adherence to these principles is critical for maintaining trust between healthcare providers and patients, as well as ensuring the highest standard of care (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994). However, in multidisciplinary

healthcare settings, where professionals from various fields work together, maintaining adherence to ethical guidelines can be challenging due to differing professional priorities, communication gaps, and role conflicts.

Each healthcare profession operates under its own code of ethics. For example, physiotherapists focus on promoting patient mobility and function while ensuring informed consent and patient autonomy (World Confederation for Physical Therapy, 2018). Pharmacists are tasked with ensuring medication safety and patient education, operating within a framework of ethical responsibilities that emphasize patient confidentiality and accuracy in dispensing (International Pharmaceutical Federation, 2018). Dentists must balance clinical treatment with patient consent and oral health education, while also addressing ethical concerns related to resource allocation and access to care (American Dental Association, 2020). Social workers, on the other hand, are often involved in advocating for patients' rights and addressing broader social determinants of health, which introduces unique ethical dilemmas related to justice and patient advocacy (National Association of Social Workers, 2017).

Despite the distinct ethical codes, healthcare professionals must collaborate in delivering holistic patient care, particularly in tertiary hospitals where patient cases are often complex and require input from multiple disciplines. In these environments, conflicts may arise when different professionals have varying approaches to ethical dilemmas, such as consent, confidentiality, and patient autonomy (Coombs and Ersser, 2004). Understanding how each profession adheres to its ethical guidelines in a multidisciplinary setting is critical for improving patient care and ensuring ethical integrity across the healthcare team.

This study aims to assess the adherence of physiotherapists, pharmacists, dentists, and social workers to their respective ethical guidelines in the context of multidisciplinary care in a tertiary hospital. By exploring the common ethical challenges they face and how these challenges impact their practice, this research seeks to provide insights into improving ethical adherence in collaborative healthcare environments.

Literature Review

1. Ethical Guidelines in Healthcare

Ethical practice in healthcare is guided by a set of principles designed to protect patient rights, promote well-being, and ensure professional integrity. The fundamental principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and confidentiality are central to healthcare ethics and are outlined in the ethical codes of various healthcare professions (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994). These principles guide clinical decision-making and help healthcare professionals navigate the complex interactions between patients, colleagues, and the healthcare system.

Each profession in healthcare has developed its own ethical guidelines to address specific responsibilities and challenges. For example, the American Dental Association's (ADA) Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct emphasizes patient autonomy, non-maleficence, and fairness in providing oral healthcare, especially in terms of resource allocation and access (McCarley, 2011). Similarly, the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) outlines ethical standards for pharmacists, focusing on ensuring patient safety, confidentiality, and the ethical distribution of medications (FIP, 2018). The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) stresses informed consent, patient autonomy, and accountability in physiotherapy practice (WCPT, 2018). For social workers, ethical guidelines, such as those set out by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), focus on advocacy, social justice, and protecting vulnerable populations (NASW, 2017).

Although these ethical principles are clear, their application in clinical practice can be challenging, especially in complex, multidisciplinary environments such as tertiary hospitals. This context requires healthcare professionals to not only adhere to their profession's ethical codes but also navigate interprofessional interactions where varying ethical priorities may conflict.

2. Adherence to Ethical Standards in Clinical Practice

Adherence to ethical guidelines is critical for maintaining trust between healthcare providers and patients. Studies show that patients value ethical behavior, such as maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and providing transparent information about treatment options (Morrison, 2008). However, research also indicates that adherence to ethical guidelines can be inconsistent due to various factors, including time constraints, heavy workloads, and insufficient training (Gambell, 2004).

One of the key areas where ethical challenges arise is in obtaining informed consent. Dentists, for example, must ensure patients are fully informed about treatment options, risks, and benefits before proceeding with care. However, time pressures and communication barriers can sometimes result in patients not fully understanding the implications of their choices, raising ethical concerns about autonomy (Chowdhury, 2017). Similarly, pharmacists face challenges in maintaining patient confidentiality, especially in busy hospital settings where patient information may be inadvertently exposed (Hattingh et al., 2015).

Physiotherapists, who often work closely with patients over extended periods, may encounter difficulties in maintaining professional boundaries while also respecting patient autonomy and preferences (Fenety et al., 2009). Social workers, who advocate for patient rights and address broader social determinants of health, may face ethical dilemmas related to balancing their duty to individual patients with broader social justice concerns (Reamer, 2018).

3. Ethical Challenges in Multidisciplinary Healthcare Teams

In multidisciplinary settings, where different professionals collaborate to provide patient care, ethical challenges can become even more complex. Each profession has its own ethical priorities and frameworks, and these can sometimes conflict in patient care decisions. For example, a physiotherapist may prioritize physical rehabilitation, while a pharmacist may focus on medication management, and a social worker may be concerned with social support and patient advocacy. These differing perspectives can lead to conflicts over treatment plans, especially when balancing risks and benefits for the patient (Martin et al., 2012).

Communication is a critical factor in addressing these ethical challenges. Studies have shown that poor communication among team members can lead to ethical issues, such as failure to properly inform patients about their treatment options or unintentional breaches of confidentiality (Vermeir et al., 2015). Effective communication and shared decision-making are key to ensuring that ethical guidelines are upheld across different disciplines in patient care (Thistlethwaite, 2012). However, achieving this level of coordination can be difficult in the fast-paced environment of a tertiary hospital, where time constraints and differing professional priorities may impede collaboration.

Moreover, the need for interprofessional collaboration can sometimes blur the lines of accountability. In multidisciplinary teams, it is essential that each professional remains accountable for their ethical obligations while also respecting the input of other team members. Research suggests that professionals who understand and respect the ethical frameworks of their colleagues are more likely to navigate ethical challenges effectively (Hall, 2005).

4. The Role of Professional Development and Institutional Support

Continuous professional development plays a significant role in promoting adherence to ethical guidelines in healthcare. Studies have shown that regular ethics training helps professionals stay updated on evolving ethical standards and improves their ability to apply these principles in clinical practice (Morrison, 2008). For instance, pharmacists and dentists who undergo regular ethics training are more likely to adhere to guidelines regarding informed consent, patient confidentiality, and patient safety (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994).

In addition to individual responsibility, institutional support is crucial for fostering an environment where ethical adherence is prioritized. Healthcare organizations play a key role in promoting ethical behavior through clear policies, regular audits, and creating a culture of accountability (Manson, 2018). Hospitals and healthcare institutions must ensure that staff from all disciplines have access to the necessary resources and training to support ethical decision-making.

Ethical decision-making frameworks and support systems, such as ethics committees and regular case discussions, have been shown to be effective in helping healthcare professionals navigate complex ethical situations (Lanceley et al., 2008). Such frameworks allow for interdisciplinary collaboration on ethical dilemmas, ensuring that patient care decisions are made with consideration of all relevant perspectives and ethical standards.

Adherence to ethical guidelines is a cornerstone of patient care across all healthcare disciplines. However, maintaining ethical integrity in multidisciplinary teams requires not only individual commitment to ethical codes but also effective communication, institutional support, and continuous professional development. As healthcare becomes increasingly collaborative, it is essential that healthcare professionals understand and respect each other's ethical frameworks to ensure that patient care is delivered with the highest ethical standards. Further research is needed to explore how multidisciplinary teams can better navigate ethical challenges and improve adherence to ethical guidelines in complex healthcare settings.

Methodology

Study Design

This study used a cross-sectional, mixed-methods design to assess staff adherence to ethical guidelines in patient care within a multidisciplinary team in a tertiary hospital. The study aimed to explore the extent to which professionals in physiotherapy, pharmacy, dentistry, and social work adhered to their respective ethical guidelines and the common ethical challenges they faced in clinical practice.

Study Setting

The study was conducted in a tertiary hospital. The hospital offers a wide range of specialized services and has well-established departments in physiotherapy, pharmacy, dentistry, and social work. These departments work in a multidisciplinary manner, handling complex patient cases requiring input from various healthcare professionals.

Participants

The participants included healthcare professionals from the physiotherapy, pharmacy, dentistry, and social work departments. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Licensed healthcare professionals with at least one year of clinical experience in their respective fields.
- Professionals currently working in direct patient care.

- Willingness to participate and provide informed consent.

A total of 100 participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation across the four professions. The final breakdown of participants was:

- 25 physiotherapists
- 25 pharmacists
- 25 dentists
- 25 social workers

Data Collection

1. Quantitative Data: Survey

A structured survey was developed to assess adherence to ethical guidelines, focusing on the following domains:

- Informed consent and patient autonomy.
- Confidentiality and data protection.
- Professional boundaries.
- Decision-making in multidisciplinary care.
- Managing conflicts between professional responsibilities.

The survey consisted of 25 closed-ended questions based on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). These questions were adapted from existing tools that measure adherence to ethical standards, and they were customized for each profession. The survey was piloted with a small group of healthcare professionals to ensure clarity and relevance before full distribution.

2. Qualitative Data: Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants (n=20), comprising five participants from each profession. The interviews aimed to explore the ethical challenges faced by professionals in greater depth, focusing on:

- Experiences of ethical dilemmas in multidisciplinary care.
- How professionals navigate conflicts between their own ethical codes and those of other disciplines.
- The role of communication and collaboration in resolving ethical issues.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were conducted in a private setting within the hospital. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the ethics committee. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the survey or participated in interviews. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the anonymity of their data. All identifiable information was removed during data analysis, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were calculated to summarize adherence to ethical guidelines across

the four professions. Comparisons between professions were made using one-way ANOVA to determine if there were significant differences in adherence levels. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

2. Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews. Two independent researchers coded the transcripts, identifying key themes related to ethical challenges and strategies used by professionals to navigate ethical dilemmas. The coding process involved identifying patterns and commonalities across the interviews, followed by grouping these into broader themes. Discrepancies between coders were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Outcome Measures

The primary outcome of this study was the level of adherence to ethical guidelines across the four professions, as measured by the survey. Secondary outcomes included the identification of common ethical challenges and the strategies used by healthcare professionals to address these challenges, as revealed through the interviews.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was its reliance on self-reported data in the survey, which may introduce bias as participants could overestimate their adherence to ethical standards. Additionally, the study was conducted in a single tertiary hospital, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other healthcare settings.

Quantitative Findings

A total of 100 healthcare professionals from four disciplines—physiotherapy, pharmacy, dentistry, and social work—completed the survey assessing their adherence to ethical guidelines. The results provide insights into the overall level of ethical adherence across these professions, highlighting areas of strength and challenges in maintaining ethical standards within a multidisciplinary care setting.

1. Demographics of Participants

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants, including their professional background, years of experience, and average patient load per week.

Characteristic	Physiotherapists (n=25)	Pharmacists (n=25)	Dentists (n=25)	Social Workers (n=25)	Total (n=100)
Mean Age (years)	34.2 \pm 6.5	35.7 \pm 7.1	38.5 \pm 5.9	40.3 \pm 8.2	37.2 \pm 7.2
Mean Years of Experience	8.5 \pm 3.2	9.1 \pm 3.5	10.2 \pm 4.0	12.5 \pm 4.5	10.1 \pm 4.0
Average Patient Load (per week)	20.6 \pm 7.2	45.2 \pm 10.1	35.4 \pm 8.3	30.3 \pm 6.7	32.8 \pm 10.6

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the study participants

2. Overall Adherence to Ethical Guidelines

The overall adherence to ethical guidelines was assessed across five key domains: informed consent, confidentiality, professional boundaries, multidisciplinary decision-making, and conflict resolution. Each domain was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater adherence to ethical standards.

Table 2 shows the mean scores for each domain across the four professions. The results indicate that overall adherence to ethical guidelines was relatively high, with some variation across professions.

Ethical Domain	Physiotherapists (Mean \pm SD)	Pharmacists (Mean \pm SD)	Dentists (Mean \pm SD)	Social Workers (Mean \pm SD)	p-value
Informed Consent	4.3 \pm 0.5	4.1 \pm 0.6	4.4 \pm 0.4	4.2 \pm 0.5	0.321
Confidentiality	4.1 \pm 0.6	4.3 \pm 0.5	4.2 \pm 0.6	4.5 \pm 0.4	0.178
Professional Boundaries	4.2 \pm 0.5	4.0 \pm 0.6	4.1 \pm 0.5	4.3 \pm 0.5	0.204
Multidisciplinary Decision-Making	3.9 \pm 0.7	3.8 \pm 0.7	4.0 \pm 0.6	4.1 \pm 0.6	0.512
Conflict Resolution	4.0 \pm 0.6	3.9 \pm 0.7	4.1 \pm 0.5	4.2 \pm 0.5	0.386

Table 2: Mean scores for adherence to ethical guidelines across professions

Key Findings:

- Informed Consent: Dentists scored the highest in adherence to informed consent (mean = 4.4), reflecting their frequent need to explain treatment options and risks to patients. There was no significant difference in this domain between the professions ($p = 0.321$).
- Confidentiality: Social workers scored highest in maintaining patient confidentiality (mean = 4.5), which is critical to their profession, especially when dealing with sensitive information. Pharmacists and physiotherapists also demonstrated strong adherence in this domain (mean = 4.3 and 4.1, respectively).
- Professional Boundaries: Social workers also reported the highest adherence to maintaining professional boundaries (mean = 4.3), which may be due to their frequent involvement in complex social and emotional situations with patients.
- Multidisciplinary Decision-Making: The adherence to ethical guidelines in multidisciplinary decision-making was relatively consistent across all professions (mean range = 3.8 to 4.1), with no significant differences observed ($p = 0.512$).
- Conflict Resolution: Dentists and social workers had slightly higher adherence scores in conflict resolution (mean = 4.1 and 4.2, respectively), though the differences were not statistically significant ($p = 0.386$).

3. Comparison of Ethical Adherence Across Professions

To assess whether there were significant differences in adherence to ethical guidelines between professions, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for each ethical domain. The results showed no statistically significant differences across professions in any of the ethical domains ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that overall adherence to

ethical standards is consistent among physiotherapists, pharmacists, dentists, and social workers in this multidisciplinary setting.

4. Adherence by Years of Experience

An analysis was also conducted to determine whether years of experience influenced adherence to ethical guidelines. Table 3 summarizes the correlation between years of experience and adherence scores across the five ethical domains.

Ethical Domain	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Informed Consent	0.18
Confidentiality	0.24
Professional Boundaries	0.15
Multidisciplinary Decision-Making	0.20
Conflict Resolution	0.21

Table 3: Correlation between years of experience and adherence to ethical guidelines (p < 0.05)

Key Findings:

- A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found between years of experience and adherence to confidentiality guidelines ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that more experienced professionals are slightly more likely to adhere to confidentiality standards.
- No significant correlations were found between years of experience and adherence in the other ethical domains, indicating that adherence to ethical standards is relatively consistent across different levels of experience.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative component of this study aimed to explore the ethical challenges healthcare professionals face in a multidisciplinary care setting and how they navigate these challenges. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants—five from each profession (physiotherapy, pharmacy, dentistry, and social work). Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and sub-themes, and representative quotes from participants are provided to illustrate these findings.

Theme 1: Navigating Professional Boundaries in Multidisciplinary Teams

Sub-theme 1.1: Balancing Professional Roles and Responsibilities

Participants reported challenges in balancing their professional responsibilities with those of other disciplines, particularly when the roles overlap or conflict. This was especially prevalent in situations where multiple team members were involved in patient care, leading to confusion over who should take the lead in decision-making.

- Participant 4 (Dentist):“Sometimes, when we’re all involved in the patient’s care, it’s hard to know where my role as a dentist ends and when I should step back to let the physiotherapist or pharmacist take over. It’s all about communication, but there are moments of overlap that cause confusion.”

- Participant 2 (Pharmacist):“In some cases, I find myself stepping into roles I’m not always comfortable with, like explaining treatment plans that involve medications and physical therapy. It can blur the lines of our professional boundaries.”

Sub-theme 1.2: Respecting the Expertise of Other Disciplines

Participants emphasized the importance of respecting the expertise of colleagues from other disciplines but noted that disagreements about the best course of action sometimes arise, particularly when their ethical frameworks differ.

- Participant 3 (Social Worker): “We all have our areas of expertise, but it can get tricky when my recommendation as a social worker doesn’t align with what the dentist or physiotherapist suggests. We need to respect each other’s input while keeping the patient’s needs at the forefront.”
- Participant 1 (Physiotherapist): “Sometimes there’s a tendency to think that what we’re doing is the most important aspect of the patient’s care, but you have to remember that every team member plays a crucial role.”

Theme 2: Challenges in Maintaining Confidentiality in Multidisciplinary Care

Sub-theme 2.1: Information Sharing and Patient Confidentiality

Several participants expressed concern about maintaining confidentiality in multidisciplinary team meetings, where patient information is shared among multiple professionals. While sharing information is necessary for coordinated care, ensuring that only relevant details are shared can be a challenge.

- Participant 5 (Pharmacist): “There are times when I feel like too much patient information is being shared during our meetings, especially details that don’t really affect my role as a pharmacist. We need to be more mindful of what’s necessary to disclose.”
- Participant 2 (Social Worker): “As a social worker, confidentiality is critical, but when you’re working in a team setting, there’s always a tension between what you need to share for the patient’s care and what should remain confidential.”

Sub-theme 2.2: Digital Confidentiality and Record-Keeping

Participants also highlighted concerns about digital confidentiality, particularly in the use of shared electronic medical records. They noted that while these systems improve access to patient information, they also increase the risk of breaching confidentiality if access is not carefully managed.

- Participant 4 (Dentist): “The digital system we use is efficient, but I worry about the number of people who have access to the patient’s entire medical record, including things that may not be relevant to their dental care.”
- Participant 3 (Physiotherapist): “There’s a lot of data in the electronic records, and while it helps to have everything in one place, it also means we need to be extra careful about who’s looking at what.”

Theme 3: Ethical Dilemmas in Informed Consent and Patient Autonomy

Sub-theme 3.1: Informed Consent in Multidisciplinary Treatment Plans

Informed consent was identified as a significant ethical challenge, particularly in situations where multiple treatments are involved, and patients may not fully understand the roles of different healthcare providers. Participants noted that patients sometimes struggled to comprehend complex multidisciplinary care plans, which made obtaining truly informed consent difficult.

- Participant 1 (Pharmacist): “When you have a multidisciplinary plan, the patient might not fully grasp how each part of the treatment fits together. It’s a challenge to explain everything in a way that respects their autonomy but doesn’t overwhelm them with too much information.”

- Participant 5 (Physiotherapist): “We try to give patients all the information they need, but when there are several professionals involved, it can become complicated. Sometimes, patients just agree without fully understanding.”

Sub-theme 3.2: Respecting Patient Preferences vs. Professional Judgment

Another dilemma arose when patient preferences conflicted with the professional judgment of healthcare providers. Participants described situations where patients refused certain treatments or medications, leading to ethical challenges in balancing respect for patient autonomy with the duty to provide appropriate care.

- Participant 2 (Dentist): “I’ve had patients refuse treatment that I know is necessary for their health, and it’s hard to know when to push back or when to respect their decision. It’s an ethical tightrope.”

- Participant 4 (Social Worker): “As a social worker, I’m always advocating for the patient’s choices, but it can be difficult when their preferences go against the medical recommendations. Finding a balance is the challenge.”

Theme 4: Conflict Resolution in Multidisciplinary Care

Sub-theme 4.1: Managing Conflicts Between Professional Priorities

Participants noted that conflicts often arose when professionals from different disciplines had differing priorities or approaches to patient care. These conflicts required careful negotiation and, in some cases, external mediation to ensure that the patient's best interests were upheld.

- Participant 3 (Pharmacist): “There have been cases where I’ve disagreed with a colleague about the best medication or treatment plan, and we’ve had to find a way to resolve it without letting the patient get caught in the middle.”

- Participant 5 (Physiotherapist): “Sometimes we’re all so focused on what we think is best that we forget to listen to each other. It takes time and effort to come to an agreement that works for everyone, especially the patient.”

Sub-theme 4.2: The Role of Communication in Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

Strong communication skills were seen as essential for resolving ethical dilemmas in multidisciplinary teams. Participants emphasized that open dialogue and regular team meetings helped prevent and resolve conflicts, but they also noted that communication breakdowns were a common source of ethical tension.

- Participant 1 (Social Worker): “When we communicate openly and regularly, it’s easier to avoid ethical issues. But when communication breaks down, that’s when problems start to arise.”

- Participant 2 (Dentist): “We try to meet regularly as a team, and it helps. But when things get busy, communication can suffer, and that’s when ethical dilemmas tend to escalate.”

Discussion

This study explored the adherence to ethical guidelines among healthcare professionals in a multidisciplinary setting, with a focus on physiotherapists, pharmacists, dentists, and social workers working in a tertiary hospital. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data revealed high overall adherence to ethical standards, but also highlighted several key challenges in maintaining ethical practice when working in a team-based healthcare environment. In particular, the findings identified issues related to professional boundaries, patient confidentiality, informed consent, and conflict resolution.

1. Navigating Professional Boundaries in Multidisciplinary Teams

The findings underscore the complexity of maintaining professional boundaries in multidisciplinary care,

where overlapping roles can lead to ethical dilemmas. Participants from all professions reported challenges in defining the limits of their responsibilities when working collaboratively, often resulting in confusion about who should lead decision-making in patient care. This is consistent with previous research, which shows that professionals in team-based healthcare settings may struggle to maintain clear boundaries, particularly when their roles intersect or conflict with those of other disciplines (Fenety et al., 2009).

The qualitative data revealed that respecting the expertise of other team members is crucial for successful collaboration, but disagreements often arise when there is a lack of clarity around professional roles. This finding highlights the need for more structured communication strategies within multidisciplinary teams to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, reducing the risk of ethical conflicts related to overstepping boundaries (Hall, 2005). Institutions could benefit from regular interprofessional meetings and clear documentation of each team member's role in patient care to prevent role confusion and enhance teamwork.

2. Challenges in Maintaining Confidentiality in Multidisciplinary Care

Maintaining patient confidentiality in a multidisciplinary setting was another significant challenge identified in this study. Participants expressed concerns about sharing patient information during team meetings and the potential for confidentiality breaches through shared digital records. These findings reflect the broader ethical challenge of balancing information-sharing for the benefit of patient care with the need to protect sensitive patient data (Hattingh et al., 2015).

Social workers, in particular, emphasized the critical importance of confidentiality in their practice, but all professions reported some level of concern about how much information is shared and with whom. This tension is well-documented in the literature, where the need for collaboration and open communication in team-based care can sometimes conflict with the ethical requirement to safeguard patient confidentiality (Vermeir et al., 2015). To address this issue, healthcare institutions should implement stricter protocols for information sharing in multidisciplinary teams, ensuring that only relevant information is disclosed to the appropriate professionals.

The concerns about digital confidentiality also point to the need for robust electronic medical record systems that allow for differentiated access, ensuring that only those directly involved in a patient's care can view sensitive information. Training on digital privacy and the ethical use of electronic records should be an ongoing part of professional development for all healthcare workers to mitigate the risk of confidentiality breaches.

3. Ethical Dilemmas in Informed Consent and Patient Autonomy

Informed consent emerged as a complex issue in multidisciplinary care, particularly when multiple treatments or interventions were involved. Participants noted that patients often struggled to fully understand the implications of their multidisciplinary treatment plans, making it difficult to ensure truly informed consent. This is consistent with findings from previous studies, which show that when healthcare involves input from multiple disciplines, patients can become overwhelmed by the information provided, potentially compromising their ability to make informed decisions (Chowdhury, 2017).

Moreover, the ethical tension between respecting patient autonomy and providing appropriate care was evident in cases where patients refused treatment that professionals deemed necessary. Dentists, in particular, expressed difficulty in navigating situations where patient preferences conflicted with their

professional judgment. This reflects a broader ethical dilemma in healthcare, where professionals must balance respect for patient choices with their duty to provide care that is in the patient's best interest (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994).

These findings suggest that healthcare professionals in multidisciplinary teams need to develop clear communication strategies that support informed consent while minimizing the risk of overwhelming patients with complex information. Simplifying the consent process, using layman's terms, and ensuring that each professional's role is clearly explained to the patient could help improve understanding and support autonomous decision-making. Additionally, shared decision-making frameworks that actively involve the patient in discussions about their care may help balance the ethical principles of autonomy and beneficence.

4. Conflict Resolution in Multidisciplinary Care

The study revealed that conflicts in multidisciplinary teams often arise when professionals from different disciplines prioritize different aspects of patient care. Participants emphasized the importance of open communication and regular team meetings in preventing and resolving conflicts. However, communication breakdowns were cited as a common source of ethical tension, particularly when time pressures or workload demands limited opportunities for team discussions. This aligns with research suggesting that poor communication is a key contributor to ethical conflicts in healthcare teams (Vermeir et al., 2015).

To address this issue, healthcare institutions should consider implementing more formalized communication protocols, such as structured team huddles or regular interdisciplinary meetings where ethical concerns can be discussed openly. Ethics committees or mediators could also play a role in resolving conflicts when they arise, providing a neutral space for professionals to discuss differing opinions and reach consensus on the best course of action for the patient (Lanceley et al., 2008). Ensuring that team members have adequate time to communicate and reflect on ethical challenges is crucial for maintaining high ethical standards in patient care.

5. Implications for Professional Development and Institutional Support

The findings of this study highlight the importance of continuous ethics training and professional development for all healthcare professionals working in multidisciplinary settings. While overall adherence to ethical guidelines was high, the challenges identified in this study indicate that there is a need for ongoing education on topics such as informed consent, confidentiality, and conflict resolution. Previous research has shown that regular ethics training improves adherence to ethical standards and helps professionals navigate complex ethical situations more effectively (Morrison, 2008).

Institutions also play a critical role in fostering ethical practice by providing the necessary support structures, such as clear ethical guidelines, access to ethics committees, and opportunities for interprofessional learning. Hospitals and healthcare organizations should ensure that staff have access to the resources they need to address ethical challenges, including time for reflection and team discussions, as well as formalized processes for addressing ethical dilemmas.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data in the survey, which may introduce bias as participants might overestimate their adherence to ethical standards. Additionally, the study was conducted in a single tertiary hospital, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other healthcare settings.

Future research could explore ethical adherence in a broader range of healthcare institutions and include objective measures of ethical behavior, such as clinical audits or case reviews.

Conclusion

This study provides important insights into the ethical challenges faced by healthcare professionals in multidisciplinary settings. While adherence to ethical guidelines was generally high, the findings highlight several areas where improvements are needed, particularly in managing professional boundaries, maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and resolving conflicts. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of clear communication strategies, institutional support, and ongoing ethics training to ensure that healthcare professionals can provide patient care that is both effective and ethically sound.

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