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Surgical Ethics: Then and Now

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: A study of surgical ethics in SushrutaSamhita in comparison to modern surgery.

Method: Though different manuscripts of medical sciences are found in ancient civilization, probably Sushrut is the foremost oldest literary resource in the field of surgery. Considering the time and socio-political scenario, Sushrut attained the reputation of highest level of surgical practice as found in SushrutSamhita. In the era of Sushruta fundamental basics of production of skilled surgeon started from selection of student, theoretical classes, practical training, recognition from administrator and ethical behavior of a surgeon are described. In the present era, lot of improvement in the field of surgery was observed; still the selection criteria for surgical discipline, the teaching and training methodology along with surgical ethics etc. remain similar as described in SushrutSamhita. The concept of surgical ethics is not specifically described in a single chapter of SushrutSamhita. But these are narrated in different chapters of different sections.

Discussion & Conclusion: AcharyaSushruta started the elaboration of surgical ethics from Sutrasthana. The ethical concept of surgery is described in SushrutSamhita in reference to both physical and moral conduct of a student, professional and academic ethics, pre-operative ethics, operative ethics, post-operative ethics and importance of experimental surgery and ethics in emergency surgery etc. All these concepts show strict parallelism with modern surgical ethics which also show the concept like importance of informed consent, doctor-doctor relationship, doctor-patient relationship, doctor-state relationship, doctor-attendant relationship, attendant-patient relationship, patient autonomy etc. Therefore AcharyaSushruta can also be called as the forefather of surgical ethics.

KEYWORDS

ShalyaTantra, Sutrasthan, Surgical ethics



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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

❑ The word 'ethics' is derived from Greek word 'ethikos' i.e., arising from custom.

❑ Medical & surgical ethics is considered as the principle of proper professional conduct concerning the right and duties of physician himself, his patients and his fellow practitioners.

❑ Amongst all the manuscripts of medical sciences as found in ancient civilization, SushrutSamhita is the foremost oldest literary resource in the field of surgery.

❑ The concept of surgical ethics as grouped in SushrutSamhita are as follows-

- ❖ General ethics
- ❖ Professional & academic ethics
- ❖ Pre-operative, operative & post operative ethics
- ❖ Experimental surgical ethics
- ❖ Ethics in emergency surgery
- ❖ Ethics in professional conduct.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

❑ A comparative study of surgical ethics as described in Sushrut Samhita with modern surgical practices.

MATERIALS & METHODS

1. General ethics:

❑ The concept of selection process of student into the discipline of ShalyaTantra, duties and responsibilities of a learning surgeon, their relation to teacher, patient etc. well are described in the chapter-Sisyaupaniyaadhaya.

❑ Sushrut gives equal emphasis on learning theoretical knowledge and its practical aspects to get administrative permission. (Sus. Sut. 3/47)

❑ One surgical disciple cannot perform surgery without having practical knowledge. (Sus. Sut. 3/48) and one cannot perform surgery only with practical knowledge lacking theoretical one.

So, a disciple of AyurvedicShalyaTantrasakha only become successful after having both theoretical & practical knowledge. (Sus.Sut. 3/50).

❑ Surgeon should go through details about all the allied subjects before entering to the medical profession. (Sush.Sut. 9/6).

❑ Registration i.e., permission from government after attaining the knowledge of both theory and practical are also mentioned in the SushrutSamhita. (Sus.Sut. 10/3)

❑ Cleanliness and vision regarding right & responsibility of teacher & student are well described in SushrutSamhita. (Sus.Sut.3/55-56)



2. Professional and Academic ethics:

❑ Diagnosis of disease with clinical examination before starting any treatment are advised. (Sus.Sut. 10/4)

❑ Prognosis of the disease to be determined and should be explained before treatment. (Sus.Sut. 10/6).

❑ The surgical treatment for diseases divided into three stages viz.-

❑ Purvakarma (Pre operative care), pradhan karma (Operative procedure), paschat karma (Post operative care). (Sus.Utt. 5/3).

❑ Through knowledge of the subject related to avayaba (anatomy), dosa, dhatu mala (i.e. physiological constituents) rasa, guna, virya, vipak of dravyas (pharmacology), nidan (pathology) & vyadhichikitsa (treatment) should be well acquainted by a disciple of surgery. (Su.Sut. 4/5)

❑ A student should possess knowledge of the eight branches of Ayurved from direct regular teaching i.e., value of all (Sus.Sut.4/5) related sciences has been described in SushrutSamhita.

3. Pre operative, operative & post operative ethics:

❑ The importance of clinical examination before any surgery is described in Sushrut Samhita. It is mentioned that without proper

history taking and physical examinations a surgeon should not go for any procedure (Su.Sut. 10/7). (sadvidapariksha and examination of bala, agni, vata, mutra, purishapravritti etc.)

❑ Preparation of patient before any surgical procedure is described in detail in SushrutSamhita, Sutrasthana, by Dalhana 5/3 along with post operative care in the same context.

❑ Concept of nil by mouth before surgery was there in SushrutaSamhita for the treatment of Mudagarbha (Obstructed labour), Udaroga (Abdominal disorder), Arsha(disease related to bleeding per rectum), Ashmari (urolithiasis), Bhagandar (perianal fistula), Mukharoga (diseases of oral cavity).

❑ Operation should be done with all preparations including assistants, paramedical staffs, drugs & instruments for the safety of the patient. (Sus.Su.5/6).

❑ The post operative patient should be shifted to post operative ward for sansarjan karma (i.e. ahara, vihara) according to the surgery. (Sus.Sut.5/34).

4. Experimental surgical ethics:

❑ It is described in SushrutSamhita in 'YogyaSutriyaadheya' (Sus.Sut.9)

❑ While describing the importance of experimental surgery (Ref. Sus.Sut. 9/5)



Sushrut has mentioned that an intelligent surgeon who did experimental surgery methodically and attained practical knowledge of the same never failed in doing surgery.

5. Ethics in emergency surgery:

अतिपातिषु रोगेषु नेच्छेद्विधिमिमं भिषक् ।

प्रदीप्तागारवच्छीघ्रतत्रकुर्यात् प्रतिक्रियाम् ।।

❑ In emergency cases, the doctor should not apply the routine methods of treatment, instead he should act as if his own house is on fire. (Sus.Sut. 5/40)

6. Ethics in professional conduct:

❑ The qualities of a learned surgeon have been mentioned by Sushrut in Sutrasthan 5/10 viz.- Boldness, swiftness in action, sharpness in his instruments, no sweating & tremor of hand and self confidence.

❑ The description of a quack practitioner has been found in Sus.Sut. 4/8 and described as those who not learned surgical technique directly under the supervision of a guru (teacher) regarding textual and practical knowledge called as 'taskarvaidya'

In modern medicine the concept of ethics found on the era of Hippocrates. Surgical ethics in modern medicine confined to-

1. Respect for autonomy
2. Informed consent
3. Practical application

4. Matter of life & death

5. Confidentiality

6. Maintaining standard of excellence.

1. Only a qualified and registered surgeon with excellent knowledge & skill can perform a surgery in a recognized centre. The autonomy of the patient should be strongly respected by a surgeon. Choice about proposed surgical treatment, refusal and permission only depends upon the patient. Surgeon has to explain prognosis of the disease, risk & outcome during & after surgery by himself.

2. Nobody other than surgeon will take the consent from patient for surgery explaining the followings-

❑ Condition & the reason why it warrants surgery.

❑ Type of surgery proposed & how it might correct the condition.

❑ Anticipated prognosis & expected side effect of proposed surgery.

❑ The unexpected hazard of proposed surgery.

❑ Any alternative and potential successful surgery.

❑ Consequence of no treatment at all.

3. Practical application:

❑ The surgery should be according to the law of country.



❑ Doctor should explain above things in the language of patient so that patient can understand and can give proper decision.

❑ In case of children necessity & consequence of surgery to be explained in front of legal guardian.

4. Matter of life & death:

❑ In case of emergency, when patient remain in danger for life & in semiconscious or unconscious state, all the routine procedures may not be possible.

❑ In dying patient a surgeon has to try his level best to save the life which should be self directed.

5. Confidentiality:

❑ The surgeon should respect the privacy of the patient & a patient have a right to control over their confidential information.

❑ While referring a patient to other hospital, the information may be conveyed to the next surgeon.

6. Maintaining standard of excellence:

❑ Surgeon should offered specialized treatment in which he is properly trained.

❑ Surgeon have a duty to monitor the performance of their colleague.

❑ Healthy criticizing regarding any mistake by a fellow surgeon will protect the right of the patient.

DISCUSSION

❑ Concept of high level ethical surgical practice was therein the time of Sushrut, which is still now applicable in the era of modern surgery.

❑ Teaching & training methodology to produce highly skilled ShalyaTantra vid (surgeon) described in SushrutSamhita which also found in the present era of surgical practices.

❑ Main concern of surgery at the time of Sushrut was patient's safety which is well accepted in the ethical aspect of modern surgery.

❑ Exposure of surgeon towards experimental surgery in models as described in Sushruta to enhance the skill which now well accepted world wide in the school of surgery.

❑ Suchita of Sharira&Mana i.e., cleanliness in body and mind of a surgeon while approaching a patient for treatment is utmost necessary as described in SushrutSamhita i.e., concept of professional conduct found in modern surgical ethical practice.

CONCLUSION

❑ Concept of surgical ethics was there in ancient Indian surgery which is applicable in



the era of modern surgery i.e. ethics then & now.

☐ Ethical surgical practice was there in ancient India for patient safety and now also in modern surgical practice with same concern.

☐ In ancient Indian civilization at the time of Sushrut, Indian surgeon performed highest level of surgical practices following the professional ethical conduct which now well accepted worldwide and should be considered as a proud of Indian civilization. Therefore it is our responsibility to preserve the great cultural heritage and glory of India by patronizing surgical practice by Ayurvedic surgeon.



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