

Ethical and Medico-Legal Challenges for Oncologists

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ABSTRACT

The ethical dilemmas often concern oncologists in their day-to-day practice. Often the ethical and medico-legal issues go together around their practice. Commonly noticed ethical issue is getting false positives during cancer detection and diagnosis. False positive test results, thence cancer misdiagnosis would lead to mental agony, cascade of health issues due to wrong treatment process and even death; further, medico-legal issues may crop up from such events. The misdiagnosis of cancer may further complicate the pre-existing health issues like hypertension due to stress and the medico-legal issues thereof. Breaking the bad news, i.e., informing cancer diagnosis to the patient poses major ethical dilemma to the oncologists. Because, often the oncologist confused whether to disclose the whole truth to the patient or to give a shielded information regarding diagnosis or the spread of cancer. Some cancer patients are fearful and unwilling to carry on radiation or chemotherapy and prefer either to quit treatment, or switch over to alternative medicines like Ayurveda, Homoeopath, etc. Here, the oncologist is in ethical dilemma whether to choose 'patient autonomy' or give preference to the principle of 'beneficence'. Similar dilemma also happens if patient wants withdrawal of a nonresponsive treatment. Decision making by the oncologist in terminally ill patients, i.e., do not resuscitate orders, euthanasia have serious ethical and medico-legal concerns, country to country. Often the oncologist tangled in ethical issues arising out of patient's personality, religion, culture and socioeconomic status. The oncologist should resolve the ethical issues by properly analyzing the situation in scientific, yet empathetic manner keeping the principles of non-maleficence and patient autonomy at upper hand. The aim of this presentation is to emphasize the commonly detected ethical and medico-legal issues around the Oncologists, and to discuss their solutions thereof.

Keywords: Cancer, Dilemma, Ethical, Medicolegal, Challenges, Oncologists

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