Aligning the International Code of Medical Ethics with the Indian Medical Ethical System: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract:

Global medical ethics has consolidated around the World Medical Association's International Code of Medical Ethics (ICME), revised in 2022 to foreground patient autonomy, physician well-being, and equity and justice in health care. This qualitative study takes the Indian medical ethical system as its standpoint and asks how the 2022 ICME aligns with the normative commitments that have shaped Indian medical practice. Using a documentary and thematic analysis of the ICME, the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations 2002, and the ancient Charaka tradition, the paper traces three themes: the status of patient autonomy against a historically paternalistic doctor-patient relationship, the distributive meaning of justice under severe resource constraint, and the institutional capacity to translate written norms into practice. The analysis finds that the ICME's principles are broadly consonant with the aspirational language of Indian codes, yet the two systems diverge in emphasis and in the machinery available to enforce them. The paper argues that global codes gain moral force in India not by supplanting indigenous frameworks but by being read through them, and that a credible Indian standpoint requires attention to the gap between codified ethics and enacted ethics.

Keywords:

International Code of Medical Ethics, Indian Medical Ethical System, Indian Medical Association, Justice in Healthcare & Doctor-patent Relationship.