ESSENCE OF SURGICAL ETHICS IN AYURVEDA

Saxena Varsha¹* and Kumar Pradeep²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Shalya tantra, Sai Ayurvedic Medical P.G College, Aligarh (U.P).
²Professor, Department of Shalya Tantra, Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Sciences Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi (U.P.).

ABSTRACT
The Word ethics is derived from the Greek word ethos means “characters”. Ethics is branch of Philosophy that defines what is good for the individual and for society and establishes the nature of obligations, or the duties, that people owe themselves and one another. Medical & surgical ethics is considered as the principle of proper professional conduct concerning the right and duties of physician/surgeon himself, his patients and his fellow practitioners. Acharya Sushruta started the elaboration of surgical ethics from Sutra sthana. The ethical concept of surgery is described in Sushrut Samhita 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 prevalence 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 Acharya Sushruta can also be called as the forefather of surgical ethics. So purpose of this review article is to elaborate description of surgical ethics is Ayurveda.

KEYWORDS: Ethics, Sushrut Samhita, Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION
Ayurveda is science of life. The training of doctors and their code of ethics and practice, in ancient India holds a salutary position in the history of medicine. Charaka clearly outlined
four ethical principles of a doctor: ‘Friendship, sympathy towards the sick, interest in cases according to one’s capabilities and no attachment with the patient after his recovery’. In the *Susruta samhita*, the doctors’ duty and obligations to the patient are stressed: ‘The patient may doubt his relatives, his sons and even his parents but he has full faith in the physician. He (the patient) gives himself up in the doctor’s hand and has no misgivings about him. Therefore, it is the physician’s duty to look after him as his own son’. *Sushruta*, the father of ancient Indian surgery was undoubtedly a great surgeon. The ethical principles enunciated and practiced then were of high-test order. In the *Ayurvedic* classics there is no separate section on ethics, but ethical concepts are ever-present and an ethical undercurrent runs through all the texts. To distil the ethical content from these large texts is difficult like extracting sugar from a cup of sweetened milk. One can only attempt to present gleanings from here and there to give a flavor of the ethical spirit.[1]

Ethics is an essential supporting discipline in the practice of Surgery. Ethics simply means the rules or principles which govern right conduct.[2] The application of ethics to the situation specific to surgical practice is termed as Surgical Ethics. In the current National Health Policy 2015; professionalism, integrity and ethics constitute the key policy principles. Ethics and surgical intervention must go hand in hand.[3] In *Ayurveda*, an elaborated description regarding ethics related to medical practice has been given.[4] Surgical ethics are practical tools designed to improve patient care, innovation and research.

**SURGICAL ETHICS**

The concept of surgical ethics as grouped in *Sushrut Samhita* are as follows

1. Qualities of surgeon
2. Principles of informed consent
3. General ethics
4. Professional and Academic ethics
5. Preoperative/ Operative / Postoperative ethics
6. Experimental surgery ethics
7. Ethics in emergency surgery
8. Principles of Limitations of the Practice and Referrals

1. **Qualities of Surgeon:** *Sushruta* has specially quoted the qualities of a surgeon viz. *Shaurya* (courageous/boldness), *Ashukriya* (prompt action), *Shastra Taikshanya* (keeping the surgical instruments sharp), *Asveda* (himself not perspiring), *Avepathu* (no tremors),
Asammoha (not illusioned/confused).\(^5\) The description of a quack practitioner has been also described in *Sushruta samhita*\(^6\) and described as those who not learned surgical technique directly under the supervision of a guru (teacher) regarding textual and practical knowledge called as ‘taskar-vaidya’. So before embarking on the surgical procedure one should assess himself that is he able to perform surgery or not.

2. Principles of informed consent

*Sushruta* was well aware about the concepts of informed consent centuries back. In the context of surgical intervention in *Ashmari Chikitsa Prakarana* there is the reference of prior consent of the king or well-wishers /relatives of the patient.\(^7\) In the context of *Moodha-Garbha Chikitsa* (treatment of dead foetus), reference of prior consent and permission of the guardian is also available.\(^8\) *Dalhana* has commented that if surgery is done without consent then surgeon is liable to be punished by death sentence and it is the choice of the patient to receive or refuse the treatment.\(^9\)

3. General ethics

In *Sushruta samhita*, sutra sthan equal emphasis given on theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge to get administrative permission.\(^10\) One surgical disciple cannot perform surgery without having practical knowledge.\(^11\) Any surgeon cannot perform surgery only if having practical knowledge and lacking theoretical one. So, an Ayurvedic *shalya chikitsa* become successful after having both theoretical & practical knowledge.\(^12\) After getting theoretical and practical knowledge surgeon take permission from King (government).\(^13\) Surgeon should go through details about all the allied subjects before entering to the medical profession. In *Sushrut Samhita* vision regarding right & responsibility of teacher & student are well described in detail.\(^14\) The concept of selection process of student into the discipline of *Shalya Tantra*, and their relation to teacher, patient etc. well are described in the chapter *Sisyaupaniyaadhaya* in *sushruta samhita*.

4. Professional and Academic ethics

A *shalya tantra chikitasaka* should have knowledge of the all the eight branches (*Shalya tantra*, *Shalakya tantra*, *Kaya Chikitsa*, *Bhuta Vidya*, *Kuamrbhtiya*, *Agada tantra*, *Rasayana tantra* and *Vajikarana tantra*) of Ayurveda from direct regular teaching i.e., value of all related branches has been described in *Sushrut Samhita*.\(^15\) In *Sushruta samhita* it is clearly mention that “A person who studies only one branch of science cannot arrive at proper conclusions, therefore a physician should try to learn as many related sciences as possible.”
Before any surgery diagnosis of diseases should be confirmed by these three methods – inspection, palpation and interrogation and six other methods (five sense such as ear, eye etc. and by interrogation) described for diagnosis of diseases.\[16\] Prognosis about diseases which are curable should be got cured, those which trend to persist should be controlled and those which are incurable should not be treated. Diseases which are persisting for more than one year should be refused for treatment generally.\[17\] Knowledge of Dravya, their rasa (taste), guna (qualities), virya (potency), vipaka (effect after digestion), dosas (humors), dhatus (tissues), malas (wastes), asayas (viscera), marma (vital spots), sira (veins), snayu (ligament), sandhi (joints), Asthi (bones), product forming the garbha (embryo) and removal of foreign bodies lost inside the body, determining the nature of wound and kinds of fracture are described in sushruta samhita.\[18\]

5. Preoperative/ Operative / Postoperative ethics

The surgical treatment for diseases divided into three stages viz.- Purvakarma (Pre operative care), pradhan karma (Operative procedure), paschat karma (Post operative care).\[19\] 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.\[20\] Operation should be done with all preparations including material such as Yantra (blunt instruments), Sastra (sharp instrument), kshara (caustic alkalis) agni (thermal cautery) shalaka (metal rods), jaulaka (leeches) , sutra (threads) , madhu (honey) ghrita (ghee), paya (milk), taila (oil), kasaya (decoction of durgs), sitousnodaka kataha (drums for cold and hot water) and parikarminah (attendants) who are affectionate, steadfast and strong.\[21\] Concept of nil by mouth before surgery was there in Sushruta Samhita for the treatment of Mudargarbha (Obstructed labour), Udaroga (Abdominal disorder), Arsha(disease related to bleeding per rectum), Ashmari (urolithiasis), Bhagandar (perianal fistula), Mukharoga (diseases of oral cavity). After surgery the patients should be shifted on post-operative room (special chamber) and advised to adhere to the regimen (diet and other activities).\[22\]

6. Experimental surgery ethics

It is described in ‘Yogya Sutriyaadhaya” of sutra sthana. Sushruta has mentioned that an intelligent surgeon who did experimental surgery methodically and attained practical knowledge of the same never failed in doing surgery. Different kinds of chedana (excising) should be demonstrated on puspa phala and alabu and trapusa etc. excess cutting and
inadequate cutting instructed on this. *Bhedana* (splitting) should be performed on bladder of animals and leather sac. *Lekhana* (scraping) by using a broad sheet of leather with hairs, *vedhana* (puncturing) by using the vein of dead animals and stalk of *lily plant*, *eshana* (probing) by using the holes in pieces of wood eaten by moths, bamboo dry *alabu*, *aharana* (extracting) by using fleshy portion of *panasa*, *bimbi*, *bilva phala*, *visravana* (draining fluids) by using plank of *salmali* wood smeared with beeswax and *sivana* (suturing) by using thin and thick cloth or leather. Different kind of *bandha* (bandaging) by using manikins prepared from mud, cloth etc. Application of *agni* (fire) and *kshara* (alkali) on soft muscle.

7. **Ethics in emergency surgery**

In emergency cases, the procedure should not be followed strictly by the physician and treatment which is urgently required should be done, just as salvaging a house which has caught fire.[23] The pain which is produced by the knife, troubles the body of patients greatly and it gets subsided by application of lukewarm ghee boiled with *yastimadhuka*.[24]

8. **Principles of Limitations of the Practice and Referrals**

Ayurveda has eight branches or specializations (*Ashtangayurveda*) and it can be concluded that the concept of specialization was well developed at that time and there were different expert practitioners of all these specializations. Informal social recognition of medical specialization evolved before the formal legal system of the present day. The medical ethics bound the physician to practice his skill within the limits of individual competence, has been well described at various places in *Ayurvedic* literature. One should not enter in the horizon of other specialty and patient should be referred to concerned specialist. In the context of *Pakva Gulma*, it has clearly been advised to refer the patient to the specialist (surgeon) who is skilled to manage the same[25] Similarly in the case of *Udar-Roga Chikitsa*.[26]

**DISCUSSION**

Concept of high level ethical surgical practice was therein the time of *Sushruta*, which is still now applicable in the era of modern surgery.[27] Teaching & training methodology to produce highly skilled described in *Sushrut Samhita* which also found in the present era of surgical practices. Main concern of surgery at the time of *Sushruta* 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 worldwide in the school of surgery. In *Ayurveda* great emphasis has been given on the practice of ethics to strengthen the bond of therapeutic relationship between the patient and
the surgeon. Moral values of Ayurveda are milestones to guide the surgeon of modern times. It is vital to understand the legal and professional importance of surgical ethics and to practice the same at all the levels of medical care.\textsuperscript{[28]}

CONCLUSION

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 Sushruta, 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.

Source of Support: Nil.

Conflict of Interest: None Declared.

REFERENCES


