

Awareness about the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice regarding Consumer Protection Act in Dental Professionals, Interns and Post Graduate Students in a Dental Institute - A Questionnaire Based Study

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Abstract: Context: Dental professionals are highly obliged to the service and welfare of the society. Any breach or malpractices in health care delivery can significantly attract a number of litigations towards the practitioner. A proper knowledge regarding Consumer Protection Act (COPRA) will not only safeguard the clinician but will also enhance safe health care delivery in a standard and efficient way. Aim: To evaluate the amount of awareness regarding the knowledge, attitude and practice regarding Consumer Protection Act amongst dental professionals, interns and post graduate (PG) students. Settings and design: A cross-sectional survey was conducted amongst interns, post-graduate students and teaching staff of Sinhgad Dental College & Hospital, Pune. Materials and methods: Census sampling was done. 196 participants were evaluated with a structured, closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire. Statistical analysis: SPSS software (version 21) was used for data analysis. One-sample Chi-Square test and Binomial tests were applied ($P > 0.05$). MS Excel was used to calculate percentages for the obtained responses. Results and conclusion: 65.88% of MDS staff, 48.75% BDS staff, 48.88% post-graduate students and 49.34% interns show a comparable were aware about Consumer Protection Act. There is a need to increase the level of awareness regarding Consumer Protection Act in dental professionals

Keywords: Consumer Protection Act, awareness, dental

1. Introduction

The ease of availability of knowledge and information has resulted in a tremendous increase in the level of awareness amongst patients regarding their rights. Any breach in health care delivery can attract legal issues towards the dental practitioner. Consumer dissatisfaction is increasing due to misleading sellers. In order to safeguard the consumers, numerous countries have developed Consumer protection organizations [1]. The Consumer Protection Act was passed in 1986 for protecting the interests of the consumers and to make provisions for establishing consumer councils and other authorities for the settlement of consumer's dispute and for matters connected therewith [2][3][4][5]. To safeguard him/herself against medicolegal scenarios, the dentist should have thorough knowledge about medical laws and practices, particularly, about the Consumer Protection Act.

2. Objective and Scope

Studies on awareness of health professionals and in particular of dentists, about medical laws seem to be rarely reported. An increase in the level of awareness amongst the

dental population will reduce the number of medicolegal litigations conferred upon the dental practitioner and his/her staff. Hence, the present study was carried out to assess the knowledge regarding Consumer Protection Act.

3. Methodology

The study was approved by the Scientific Advisory Committee and Institutional Ethics Committee.

Census sampling technique was applied which included the teaching staff (BDS and MDS), interns and post-graduate students of Sinhgad Dental College and Hospital, Pune. Inclusion criteria consisted of participants who have completed their undergraduate course including post-graduate students and teaching staff of Sinhgad Dental College and Hospital. Interns were also included in the study. A total of 196 subjects comprised the sample.

A pre-validated, closed-ended questionnaire which consisted of 10 questions pertaining to "Consumer Protection Act" was distributed amongst the subjects. The questionnaire was as follows:

Q. 1	Do you know about Consumer Protection Act? a. Yes b. No
Q. 2	When was Consumer Protection Act started? a. 1986 b. 1987 c. 1988 d. Don't know
Q. 3	Do dental health professionals come under Consumer Protection Act? a. Yes b. No c. Don't know
Q. 4a	Is there a time limit to file a complaint under Consumer Protection Act from the time of incidence? a. Yes b. No c. Don't know
Q. 4b	If yes, what is the time limit for filing a complaint? a. 1 year b. 2 years c. 3 years d. 4 years
Q. 5a	What is the claim amount at National commission level under Consumer Protection Act? a. Upto Rs. 20 lakhs b. Over Rs. 20 lakhs upto Rs. 1 crore c. Over Rs. 1 crore d. Don't know
Q. 5b	What is the claim amount at State commission level under Consumer Protection Act? a. Upto Rs. 20 lakhs b. Over Rs. 20 lakhs upto Rs. 1 crore c. Over Rs. 1 crore d. Don't know
Q. 5c	What is the claim amount at district forum level under Consumer Protection Act? a. Upto Rs. 20 lakhs b. Over Rs. 20 lakhs upto Rs. 1 crore c. Over Rs. 1 crore d. Don't know
Q. 6	Is a dentist liable for negligence of his/her staff? a. Yes b. No c. Don't know
Q. 7	Have you attended any workshop/courses on medicolegal issues in healthcare? a. Yes b. No

The obtained results were analyzed using MS Excel to calculate percentages. SPSS software v.21 was used and Chi-Square test was applied ($P>0.05$) In order to avoid bias, the statistician was blinded.

4. Results

The questionnaire comprised of 10 questions from which the following results were obtained:

The results of Q.no.1 assessed the level of awareness regarding Consumer Protection Act. 13.3% of the subjects were not aware whereas 86.7% were aware about COPRA [Fig.1]

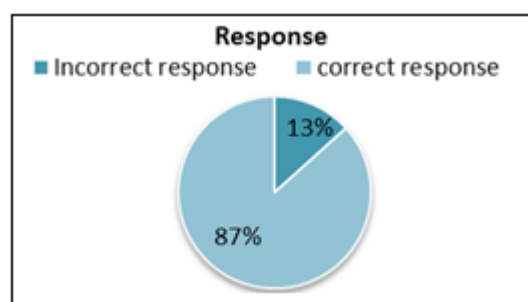


Figure 1

For Q.no 2, 66.8% of the subjects gave an incorrect response and 33.2% gave a correct response regarding the year in which COPRA was implemented [fig. 2].

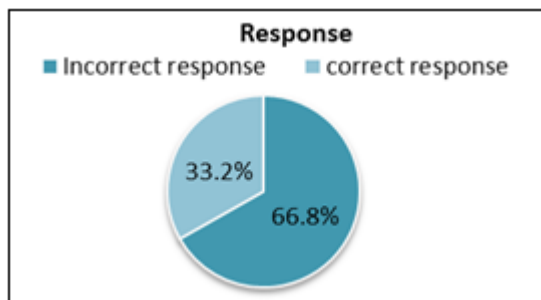


Figure 2

Q.no 3 assessed whether the subjects were aware about dental health professionals coming under COPRA. 31.1% gave an incorrect response and 68.9% gave a correct response [Fig. 3].

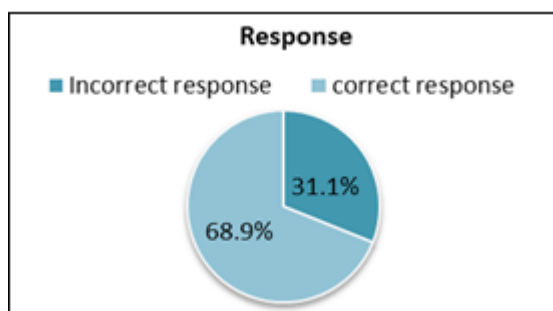


Figure 3

Q.no 4a assessed whether the subjects were aware if there is a time limit for filing a complaint under COPRA or not. 32.7% of the samples gave an incorrect response and 67.3% gave a correct response [Fig. 4]

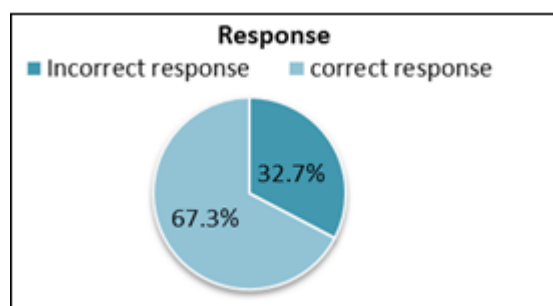


Figure 4

Q.no 4b assessed the level of awareness about the time limit for filing a complaint under COPRA amongst the subjects. 62.2% of the subjects gave an incorrect response and 37.8% gave the correct response [fig. 5].

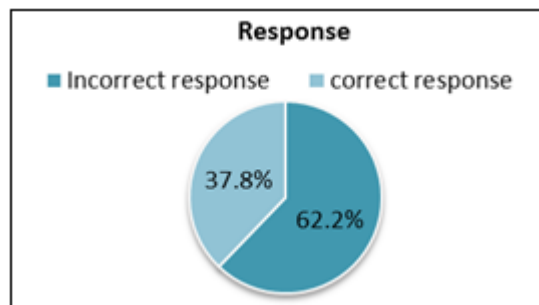


Figure 5

6. Q. no 5a was regarding the claim amount at National commission level under COPRA. 61.2% of the responses were incorrect and 38.8% gave the correct response [Fig.6]

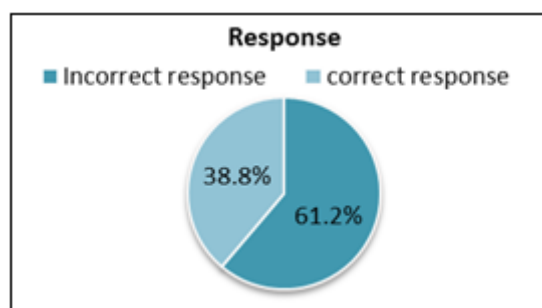


Figure 6

7. Q.no 5b was regarding the claim amount at State commission level under COPRA. 54.6% gave an incorrect response and 45.4% gave the correct response [fig. 7]

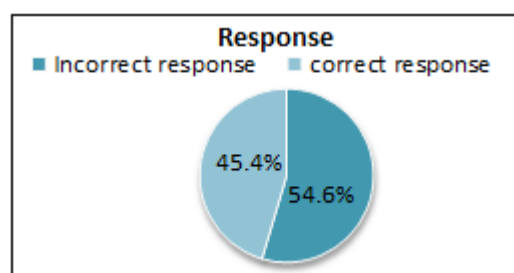


Figure 7

8. Q. no 5c was regarding the claim amount at district forum level under COPRA. 61.2% gave an incorrect response and 38.8% gave the correct response [Fig. 8]

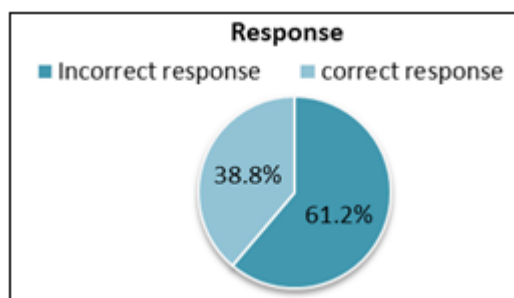


Figure 8

9. Q. no 6 was regarding a dentist's liability for negligence of his/her staff or not. 33.7% gave an incorrect response and 66.3% gave the correct response [Fig. 9].

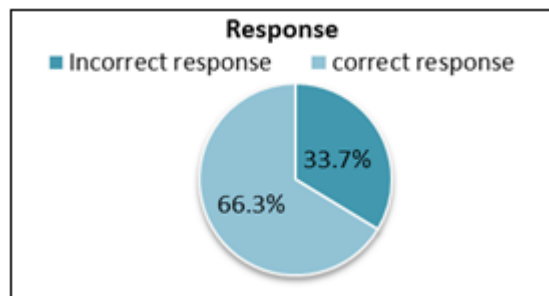


Figure 9

10. Q. no 7 assessed whether the subjects have attended any workshop/courses on medicolegal issues in healthcare. 63.3% of the subjects have never attended such a course/workshop whereas 36.7% have attended training regarding medicolegal issues in some form or the other [Fig. 10]

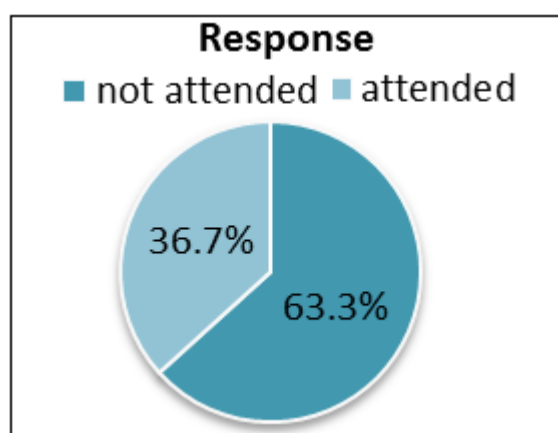


Figure 10

One-sample Chi-square test and one-sample binomial test was applied. The results obtained were statistically significant ($P = 0.05$) except for Q.no 2 where P value was 0.721

The results of the present study show that MDS staff had greater awareness about medical laws (65.88%), BDS staff, Post-graduate students and interns show a comparable amount of awareness (48.75%, 48.88% and 49.34% respectively)

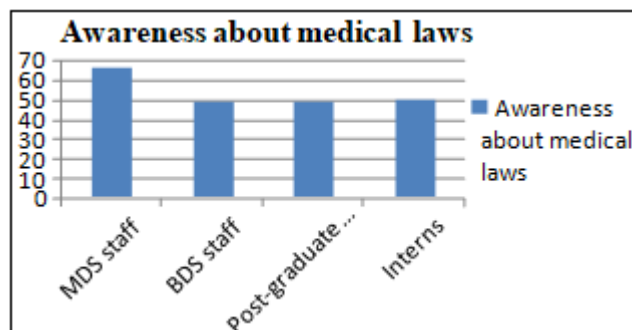


Figure 11

5. Discussion

Consumer Protection Act (CPA) is a piece of legislation implemented in India in 1986 [6]. CPA provides a forum in

order to safeguard the consumers' rights and establishes guidelines for speedy redressal of their grievances against unethical medical practices [7]. Three terms strategically mentioned in the CPA are Consumer, Service, and Deficiency[8]. The focus of the present study was on the knowledge and awareness regarding CPA amongst dental professionals, students and interns.

As reflected by the results of the 1st question, 13.3% of the participants of this study were not aware about COPRA. This is detrimental to the dental society per se as lack of knowledge will result in increased consequences which the dental society will have to face as a whole. Also, the results of the 3rd question reflect that merely 68.9% of the participants were actually aware that dental professionals come under COPRA. This was surprising as more than 1/4th of the participants exhibited lack of knowledge of the same, thereby increasing the probabilities of attracting undue litigations.

On November 13th, 1995 CPA was applied to medical/dental profession, hospitals, dispensaries, nursing homes and other related services [9]. Under this law, patients can file lawsuits in consumer courts in case perceived negligence [10]. Contributed by the lack of knowledge, there is an increased risk of malpractice, especially from complex case situations. The increasing patient population is becoming more aware about their rights, thereby taking action by contacting the consumer forum to lodge their complaints [11]. The 4th question of our questionnaire was regarding the filing of a complaint against a dental health care provider under the COPRA. 67.3% of the participants were aware that dental professionals come under COPRA but only 32.7% had the correct knowledge about the time limit for the same.

Knowledge about the claim amounts at national, state and district forum levels was assessed in the next 3 questions. The results show that the subjects had greatest knowledge about the claim amount at state commission level followed by awareness about district and national commission levels. In case of negligence/malpractices by the dental staff, the dentist is liable for litigations under COPRA. As reflected by the sixth question, 33.7% of the participants were not aware about this. This might be due a lack in the Indian educational system which has limited information on CPA in theory and its applicability in detail in the dental curriculum both in the undergraduate post-graduate, both in formal and informal ways [12].

A basic knowledge of the various medical laws, including but not confined to COPRA, will definitely help the dental professionals to practice and provide healthcare without undue worry of facing jurisdictions.

6. Conclusion

The results of the present study conclude that dentists and postgraduate students showed a significantly greater knowledge and attitude scores than those with interns.

There is a strong need for increasing the level of awareness and updating the understanding regarding medical laws and COPRA amongst all stakeholders including doctors, patients and hospital management [13] [14] [15]. In order to increase the awareness in the dental society, it is extremely important that such topics be included in the graduation curriculum.

Conducting bi-annual workshops, CDE programs and courses will ensure reinforcement and updated knowledge regarding the various medical laws particularly amongst dental professionals

7. Drawbacks and limitations

- 1) The questionnaires were distributed in a single center
- 2) Future studies conducted over multiple-centers can give more reliable data.
- 3) The questionnaire consisted of only 10 questions which limits the assessment of knowledge regarding the current topic.
- 4) An extensive questionnaire with more questions can prove to be more effective for assessing the same

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