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Review Article

Application of Eastern Philosophical Principles to Ethical Dilemmas in Daily Medical Practice

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This mini review highlights the underappreciated influence of Indian philosophical principles on medical ethics. Emphasizing concepts such as ahimsa, dharma, compassion, impermanence, non-attachment, and holistic healing, it explores their profound relevance in guiding healthcare professionals through complex ethical dilemmas. While Western philosophies dominate medical ethics discourse, there is a need to acknowledge and research the application of non-Western philosophies in medical practice. A broader recognition and integration of non-Western ethical principles to medical practice can foster culturally sensitive and ethically sound patient care.

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In the realm of medical ethics, the application of Indian philosophical principles from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism offers profound insights into navigating complex ethical dilemmas. Hinduism, with its emphasis on ahimsa (non-violence) and karma (action and consequences), provides a foundational framework for ethical decision-making [1]. Ahimsa, central to Jainism as well, underscores the importance of minimizing harm to all living beings, guiding healthcare professionals towards compassionate and non-invasive practices [2]. The concept of dharma (duty or righteousness) in Hinduism and Buddhism reinforces the ethical responsibility of healthcare providers to act in the best interest of their patients while upholding moral values [3].

Buddhism's teachings on compassion, mindfulness, and interconnectedness resonate deeply in medical ethics, encouraging practitioners to approach patient care with empathy and understanding. The Buddhist principle of impermanence reminds healthcare professionals of the transient nature of life, fostering a sense of humility and respect for the human experience in the face of illness and suffering [4].

Jainism's emphasis on aparigraha (non-attachment) and anekantavada (non-absolutism) encourages healthcare providers to maintain a balanced perspective, acknowledging the complexity of ethical dilemmas and embracing diverse viewpoints in decision-making processes [5].

Ayurveda, an ancient Indian system of medicine deeply rooted in Hindu philosophical principles, contributes significantly to medical ethics by promoting holistic healing approaches that consider the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit. Ayurveda prioritizes personalized care, preventive medicine, and the use of natural remedies to restore balance and harmony within the individual. This integrative approach aligns with the modern ethical principles of beneficence (doing good) and non-maleficence (avoiding harm), emphasizing the importance of treating patients as unique individuals with distinct needs and vulnerabilities [6].

The significant contributions of Eastern philosophies like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Ayurveda to the development of medical ethics is rarely acknowledged in medical education and literature. To that end, Konduru and Das [7] have written an important paper bringing such contributions to light. Their work, however, is most significant for practically showing how these ancient philosophies continue to be relevant in today's times and how they can be applied to navigate complex ethical dilemmas in day-to-day medical practice. The paper [7] serves as a ready reckoner for doctors who are practicing Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains when faced with an ethical dilemma, particularly when implementing living wills.

Medical ethics is heavily biased in favour of Western philosophies. However, doctors come from diverse backgrounds and subscribe to many philosophies, including those originating from India. To alleviate the ethical dilemmas of doctors who do not subscribe to Western philosophies, more research into the application of non-Western philosophies to daily medical practice must be urgently undertaken.

In conclusion, by integrating Eastern philosophical concepts such as ahimsa, dharma, compassion, impermanence, non-attachment, and holistic healing, doctors can navigate ethical challenges with wisdom, empathy, and cultural sensitivity.

Statements and Declarations

References

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Declarations