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KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND RECORD-KEEPING PRACTICES REGARDING CONSENT AND MEDICAL CERTIFICATION AMONG HOMOEOPATHIC DOCTORS

***Dr. Sandeep Dwivedi**

MD, Homoeopathy [Pharmacy] Principal & Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology Arrdekta Homoeopathic Medical College, Sabarkantha, Gujarat.

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*Corresponding Author: Dr. Sandeep Dwivedi

MD, Homoeopathy [Pharmacy] Principal & Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Arrdekta Homoeopathic Medical College, Sabarkantha, Gujarat.

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary healthcare, robust medico-legal documentation is as vital as therapeutic competence. Homoeopathic practitioners, bound by the same legal frameworks as conventional physicians, frequently handle tasks involving informed consent, injury reporting, and medical certification. However, data on their regulatory compliance remains sparse. This study evaluated and compared the knowledge, attitudes, and record-keeping practices regarding medico-legal obligations among rural and urban homoeopathic doctors.

Methodology

A cross-sectional, survey-based study was conducted among registered homoeopathic practitioners across rural and urban sectors. A validated, structured questionnaire was used to assess three primary domains: knowledge of medical jurisprudence, attitudes toward legal liabilities, and actual record-keeping compliance (specifically regarding informed consent, injury reporting, and the issuance of medical certificates). Statistical analyses, including Chi-square tests and independent t-tests, were utilized to evaluate disparities between the rural and urban cohorts.

Results

The study revealed a significant disparity between urban and rural practitioners. While urban clinicians demonstrated higher theoretical knowledge scores regarding consumer protection laws and consent mandates, comprehensive record-keeping compliance was suboptimal across both groups. A notable percentage of rural practitioners reported challenges in standardized injury reporting due to limited local infrastructure and lack of formal training.

Conversely, positive attitudes toward undergoing regular medico-legal continuing medical education (CME) were universally high.

KEYWORDS: Medical Jurisprudence; Homoeopathy; Informed Consent; Medical Certification; Record-Keeping; Rural-Urban Disparity.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary healthcare, the intersection of clinical practice and law demands that medical practitioners—irrespective of their system of medicine—possess a robust understanding of medical jurisprudence. Medico-legal responsibilities are no longer exclusive to conventional allopathic physicians. Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) practitioners, including homoeopathic doctors, are bound by identical legal, ethical, and statutory obligations regarding patient care and regulatory documentation. Across global healthcare frameworks, particularly in nations with integrated healthcare models, homoeopathic clinicians frequently encounter situations requiring informed consent, injury evaluation, and the issuance of legally valid medical certificates.

Among these responsibilities, record-keeping and documentation serve as the primary legal shield for practitioners and a crucial mechanism for protecting patient rights. Informed consent is a foundational ethical requirement that validates patient autonomy and serves as a vital defense against allegations of medical negligence. Similarly, the issuance of medical or fitness certificates holds significant legal weight, as fraudulent or careless certification can invite civil and criminal liabilities under consumer protection laws and medical council regulations. Despite the profound implications of these tasks, anecdotal evidence suggests that medical jurisprudence is often relegated to a secondary status during undergraduate medical training, leading to a gap between academic knowledge and real-world clinical application.

Furthermore, geographic disparities present a significant hurdle in standardizing medico-legal compliance. Rural practitioners often operate in resource-constrained environments, with limited access to continuous legal updates, digital record-keeping tools, and professional forensic consultations compared to their urban counterparts. While urban homoeopathic clinicians may demonstrate higher awareness due to institutional environments and closer proximity to regulatory updates, suboptimal compliance in documentation remains a systemic issue across both cohorts.

Understanding the precise nature of these gaps is essential for designing targeted educational interventions and policy reforms. While extensive literature evaluates medico-legal awareness among allopathic professionals, comprehensive data regarding homoeopathic practitioners remains significantly sparse. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate and compare the knowledge, attitudes, and practical record-keeping compliance regarding consent and medical certification between rural and urban homoeopathic doctors, providing an empirical foundation to bridge the gap between therapeutics and medical law.

Section 1: Methodology

Study Design and Setting

A **cross-sectional, observational, survey-based design** to assess and compare the knowledge, attitudes, and record-keeping practices regarding consent and medical certification among homoeopathic practitioners.

Inclusion Criteria

- Registered homoeopathic practitioners holding a recognized degree (BHMS, MD-Hom, or equivalent).
- Clinicians actively practicing in either an institutional setup or independent private clinics.
- Practitioners who consent to participate voluntarily.

Exclusion Criteria

- Interns or undergraduate students.
- Practitioners who are retired or not actively engaging in patient care.
- Incomplete questionnaire submissions.

Sample Size and Sampling Strategy: 450 participants, evenly distributed between rural (n=225) and urban (n=225) cohorts using stratified random sampling techniques.

Data Collection Instrument

Data gathered using a structured, self-administered questionnaire.

Section 2: 20-Question Structured Survey Tool

Part A: Demographic & Professional Profile

1. **Geographic Location of Practice:** Urban / Rural
2. **Highest Professional Qualification:** BHMS / MD (Hom) / PhD / Other
3. **Years of Clinical Experience:** < 5 years / 5–10 years / > 10 years

Part B: Knowledge Domain (K)

1. According to your national/local council regulations, are homoeopathic doctors legally on par with allopathic practitioners regarding documentation standards? Yes / No / I am not sure
2. At what age can a patient legally give independent valid consent for medical examination in a non-emergency clinical setting? 12 years / 16 years / 18 years / I am not sure
3. Which of the following elements is strictly required to satisfy the legal definition of "Informed Consent"? Verbally explaining costs only / Disclosing diagnosis, risks, and alternatives / Signing a blank document / None of the above
4. A medical certificate issued by a registered homoeopathic practitioner is legally admissible in a court of law. True / False / Depends on the state
5. Issuing a false or negligent medical certificate can lead to which of the following disciplinary or legal outcomes? Professional misconduct charges / Civil liability / Criminal charges for forgery / All of the above
6. In a case involving suspected domestic violence or poisoning, a private homoeopathic practitioner is legally obligated to notify local authorities. Yes / No / Only if the patient permits
7. Under consumer protection laws applicable to medical professionals, how long are you legally required to preserve outpatient clinical case records? 1 year / 3 years / 5 years / Permanently

Part C: Attitude Domain (A)

1. Do you believe that comprehensive medico-legal documentation takes away valuable time from therapeutic case-taking in homoeopathy?
 - Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
2. How confident do you feel handling formal legal cross-examinations regarding a medical certificate you issued?
 - Extremely Confident / Moderately Confident / Slightly Confident / Not Confident At All
3. Do you feel the undergraduate curriculum (BHMS) provides sufficient practical exposure to handle medical certification and consent disputes?
 - Yes, completely / Partially / No, not at all
4. Would you willingly attend regular, mandatory Continuing Medical Education (CME) seminars focusing entirely on medical law and jurisprudence?
 - Yes / No / Uncertain

5. Do you think rural homoeopathic practitioners face unfair structural disadvantages in remaining updated on changing medical regulations compared to urban practitioners?
- Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

Part D: Practice & Compliance Domain (P)

1. How frequently do you obtain explicit written informed consent before conducting physical examinations of a different-gender patient?
 - Always / Often / Sometimes / Never
2. Do you maintain a systematic ledger or digital repository with duplicates of every medical/fitness certificate issued from your clinic?
 - Yes, always / Occasionally / No, never
3. When issuing a medical certificate for illness, do you record distinct identification marks or thumbprints of the patient on the certificate itself?
 - Always / Sometimes / Never
4. If a patient presents with an injury sustained from a road traffic accident, how do you manage the case profile?
 - Treat and document thoroughly without calling police / Refer immediately to a government hospital after primary aid / Advise the patient to avoid formal reporting
5. What is your primary mode of clinical record-keeping?
 - Standardized printed case sheets / Handwritten loose notes / Comprehensive Digital Electronic Health Records (EHR) / Minimal/No paper trail

Section 3: Results

Demographic and Professional Characteristics

A total of **450 registered homoeopathic practitioners** completed the survey, representing an even split between urban n=225 and rural n=225 sectors. The cohort showed a balanced distribution across varying brackets of clinical experience and postgraduate qualifications.

Table 1: Comparison of Core Medico-Legal Knowledge Scores.

Medico-Legal Knowledge Variables	Urban Practitioners (n=225)	Rural Practitioners (n=225)	(chi ^{2}) (t)-value	(p)-value
Aware of legal parity with allopathic documentation laws	198 (88.0%)	162 (72.0%)	18.00	<0.001*
Correctly identified legal age for independent consent (18 years)	210 (93.3%)	185 (82.2%)	13.56	<0.001*
Correctly identified mandatory 3-year record retention period	145 (64.4%)	98 (43.6%)	19.54	<0.001*
Aware of criminal liability for false medical certificates	215 (95.6%)	208 (92.4%)	1.89	0.169
Mean Cumulative Knowledge Score $\pm$ SD) (Max: 7)	5.8 $\pm$ 1.1	4.6 $\pm$ 1.4	(t=10.12\)	<0.001*

- *Statistically significant at ($p < 0.05$)

Table 2: Behavioral Attitudes Towards Medico-Legal Duties.

Attitudinal Statements & Responses	Urban (n=225)	Rural (n=225)	(chi ^{2}) value	(p)-value
"Documentation takes away precious time from therapeutic case-taking" • Agree / Strongly Agree • Neutral • Disagree / Strongly Disagree	42 (18.7%) 18 (8.0%) 165 (73.3%)	88 (39.1%) 25 (11.1%) 112 (49.8%)	26.45	<0.001*
Feels fully confident handling judicial cross-examinations • Highly / Moderately Confident • Slightly / Not Confident	95 (42.2%) 130 (57.8%)	52 (23.1%) 173 (76.9%)	18.52	<0.001*
Willing to attend mandatory, regular CMEs on medical law • Yes • No / Uncertain	208 (92.4%) 17 (7.6%)	212 (94.2%) 13 (5.8%)	0.58	0.446

- *Statistically significant at ($p < 0.05$)

Table 3: Practical Record-Keeping and Compliance Disparities.

Clinical Practice & Documentation Parameters	Urban (n=225)	Rural (n=225)	(chi ²) value	(p)-value
Primary Method of Clinical Record-Keeping • <i>Digital Electronic Health Records (EHR)</i> • <i>Standardized Printed Case Sheets</i> • <i>Handwritten Loose Sheets / Minimal Notes</i>	85 (37.8%) 112 (49.8%) 28 (12.4%)	12 (5.3%) 98 (43.6%) 115 (51.1%)	108.40	<0.001*
Maintains a ledger/duplicate file of every certificate issued • <i>Always</i> • <i>Occasionally / Never</i>	182 (80.9%) 43 (19.1%)	104 (46.2%) 121 (53.8%)	58.07	<0.001*
Records patient identification marks on medical certificates • <i>Always</i> • <i>Sometimes / Never</i>	140 (62.2%) 85 (37.8%)	78 (34.7%) 147 (65.3%)	34.12	<0.001*
Obtains written informed consent for opposite-gender physical exams • <i>Always</i> • <i>Often / Sometimes / Never</i>	160 (71.1%) 65 (28.9%)	118 (52.4%) 107 (47.6%)	16.63	<0.001*

• *Statistically significant at ($p < 0.05$)

CONCLUSION

While homoeopathic practitioners maintain a positive attitude toward legal compliance, a critical gap exists between theoretical knowledge and practical documentation. There is an immediate need to integrate structured, case-based medico-legal training into the undergraduate curriculum and post-graduate CME frameworks to bridge the rural-urban divide and safeguard both patient rights and clinical practice.

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