

Changing Doctor–Patient Relationship With Special Reference To the Consumer Protection Act

Author

Shalu Nigam

Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Anjali Gandhi
Department of Social Work
Jamia Millia Islamia

The present study is taken up with the view to understand changing doctor–patient relationship with special reference to the Consumer Protection Act. It is exploratory in nature and aims to meet the following objectives.

Objectives: The objectives of the present research study are:

1. To understand the changing doctor–patient relationship in an urban context.
2. To seek the opinion of respondents about the patient's grievance redressal mechanism with special emphasis on the Consumer Protection Act 1986.
3. To ascertain the implications of the Consumer Protection Act in bringing about change in the doctor–patient relationship.
4. To gain insight about the rights and responsibilities of a doctor and a patient in the doctor–patient relationship.
5. To draw outcomes and suggestions from the study.

Research Design and Methodology:

To achieve the above objectives, data was collected from nine different private medical institutions in Delhi. The sampling was done in two stages. In the first stage, three private hospitals and six nursing were selected. In the second stage, patients and doctors were contacted. Information was also obtained from medical social workers, lawyers and patient activists to gain in depth insight into the matter. Over all, 198 patients, 112 doctors, 37 lawyers, 10 consumer activists and 5 medical social workers were selected for the purpose of study. Different tools were used to collect data like interview schedule, questionnaire and observations. Information was also gathered from various other sources including government offices, consumer forums and libraries. The data thus, collected was analysed and presented in relevant chapters.

Research Findings:

The results indicate that this relationship is changing with the changing socio–economic milieu. It may be concluded from the research findings that the doctor–patient relationship is undergoing significant changes. These are:

1. Medicine system is evolving from a traditional healing system operating in a private secret domain to a modern rational, scientific and technological system of cure operating in a free market economy;

2. The image of a doctor is changing from a healer, a God or a life saviour to a scientifically trained provider of medical services;
3. The image of a patient is altering from a vulnerable benefactor of medical care services to a vigilant consumer of medical services with the recognisable rights;
4. The doctor–patient relationship is developing itself from medical paternalism to patient sovereignty. The once `caring relation? seems to be replaced by the `curing relation' relying on technological intervention. The Parson's model of doctor–patient relationship, now seems to be getting slowly replaced by the consumeristic model of health care in India;
5. With the changing structure of health care, a medical encounter is becoming a frightening experience for patients. It is playing a role in increasing their anxiety and is affecting them socially, emotionally and financially.

Hence, it may be said that the doctor–patient relationship in India is in transition stage. The data findings illustrate that a climate for a new trend in the medicine is emerging gradually. The respondents in the present study believe that the Consumer Protection Act is making a profound impact on the doctor–patient relationship. It is making both positive and negative implications on cost and quality of care. One of the implications of the Act is that it is warning the doctors regarding their accountability and is also awakening patients regarding their rights and responsibilities. Thus, the concept of consumerism has strengthened since the medical services were brought under the ambit of the Act.