

Ordinance Against Increasing Violence Against the Healthcare Providers in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Violence against doctors and other health care workers is a global problem. It is increasing in Nepal in recent years. Patients' relatives and third parties are threatening the doctors and hospital authorities demanding money for dead bodies in the name of negligence. Nepal Medical Association had been raising voice against these kinds of activities for a long time. Recently, an ordinance had been passed by the president of Nepal and tabled in the parliament in May 2022.

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INTRODUCTION

In Nepal, there are increasing incidents where healthcare workers are abused by patients' relatives after the demise of a patient often without a full understanding of medical reasoning. The incidents at Nepal Medical College, Jorpati, Kathmandu¹; Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH), Maharajgunj, Kathmandu in 2020^{2,3} and the Bheri incident⁴ are among the popular ones. Many incidents in the periphery sides were not reported and settled by the local authorities. Health workers and health institutions were targeted for money in the name of negligence instead of filing a case against negligence in Nepal Medical Council.

Two doctors were manhandled by the locals of Besigaun in Nepal Medical College, Jorpati, in May 2020 after the

death of their relative. Doctors were cursed, slapped and kicked; the mob even tried to hit the doctors with a steel bar. Later, a committee was formed for investigation, but due to the lack of proper laws, adequate actions could not be taken.¹ Such harsh activities by policemen deteriorate the morale of the front-line health workers who are expecting support at least from the security professionals. Further, even more threatening event took place in Bheri Hospital in Nepalgunj, where a doctor and a staff nurse on duty at COVID ward were physically assaulted by the relatives of a deceased patient. They tried to kill them by strangulation. Moreover, three nurses were compelled to jump out of the roof at the cost of saving their lives.²

In a study by Prajapati et al, 23% of health workers were insecure at their workplaces. Out of all health workers,

more doctors were insecure, about 30%. Health workers working in central regions were more secure (around 83%) compared to other parts of Nepal. Sixteen percent health workers were facing some arguments nationwide and this rate was high in Terai region (18%) as compared to other regions of Nepal. Gender-based and sexual harassment on female health workers were 63% and 56.5% respectively on rural areas of Nepal. Only 31% of health workers suffering in the workplace had received treatment and compensation.⁵ In another study by Roshna et al in Baglung district in 2013, in the duration of one year, two-thirds of health workers (65%) had reported at least one type of violence in their workplace. Out of them, 46.5% were physical, 29.3% were verbal and 36% were sexual. The reasons behind not reporting violence were lack of incidental reporting policy, anti-violence measures and support from the management.^{6,7,8} The violence is not limited to the doctors only. In a study among nurses in a tertiary hospital in Kathmandu, 68% of the nurses had experienced violence at any point in time. Forty four percent of nurses had experienced general harassment which was the second most commonly experienced after verbal abuse which was experienced by 55% of nurses. 18% had experienced physical misconduct at any time in the past.⁶

The Nepal Medical Association (NMA) and many other doctors' associations have been demanding "jail without bail" for a long time.³ To appease health professionals, an ordinance was issued by the president of Nepal and tabled in the parliament of Nepal on May 2022.⁴ The ordinance's crime and punishment related regulation has provisioned that setting ablaze facilities in the health sector will be liable to a jail sentence of three years or a fine amounting to Rs 2,00,000 to Rs 5,00,000. Vandalising the health sector or hurting health workers and staffers of the health sector can attract a jail sentence of up to three years or a fine of Rs 3,00,000.⁴

There could be several reasons behind the increasing violence in healthcare facilities. Doctor-patient communication is one of the main reasons. A study

conducted at a tertiary hospital in Lalitpur, Nepal concluded that 47.5 % of 101 participants showed medium to low overall satisfaction (communication skills, interpersonal manner, confidentiality maintenance and general satisfaction) with the healthcare facilities provided at the hospital.⁹ In addition, a study conducted at a tertiary hospital in Kathmandu, Nepal found that 4% of 437 patients were not satisfied with the doctors' skills of explaining how to take medicines.¹⁰ Apart from these, the management team of the hospital also can help in mitigating this problem by allocating suitable duty hours for healthcare staff to prevent burnout which will eventually improve patient safety and care, which ultimately leads to decreased violence against healthcare staff.¹¹

CONCLUSION

The possible reasons behind the violence towards health professionals by patients' relatives may be stress due to sudden demise of loved ones, influence of alcohol, financial loss, aggravation by the broker for money and poor communication with the doctor and healthcare staff. In the present context of Nepal, patients are demanding a hundred percent guarantee in the treatment which is practically impossible. Treatment is done by using medical knowledge and skills for the betterment of patients. Even a man-made machine can't be guaranteed a hundred percent efficacy, so everyone must thoroughly understand that the human body is not in total control of doctors and they must not expect that every patient under a doctor's supervision will recover. Proper doctor-patient communication, proper counselling and allocation of fixed and manageable duty hours to the doctors and nurses may fix these issues to some extent. There should be a neutral arbitrator who can address concerns from both sides and provide a resolution. It's good news that the government has passed a law regarding this matter. However, it should be strictly implemented instead of remaining only on paper. Amendment is necessary according to the time and situation.

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