

Awareness about Consumer Protection Act among patients visiting a private dental institute at Dharwad: A Descriptive study

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Abstract

Objectives: To assess the knowledge regarding CPA among patients visiting a private dental institution at Dharwad.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive survey was carried out on 400 patients visiting a private dental college at Dharwad and the data was collected through an interview based questionnaire consisting of 13 closed ended questions on CPA. Statistical analysis was done using Chi-square test.

Results: 62% of the study participants have heard about CPA, but only 30% knew that dental services are applicable under CPA and in case of medical service fault/error, 54% participants would visit police station. 80% of the participants don't even know the location of consumer court. And many patients think that to approach consumer court they will have to pay fees and hire a lawyer.

Conclusion: Knowledge of patients regarding CPA is low. Instead of going to lawyer or consumer court, more than half of the study population would prefer to go to police station. This shows that despite of presence of such beneficial legislation people are unaware of it. Doctor's tries to provide best services to their patient but still sometimes their negligence can cause an injury to patient. If people becomes more aware of their rights and legislations this would improve the quality of services.

Keywords: Consumer protection act, Knowledge, Awareness, Dentist, Patient.

Introduction

Medical profession is considered as a most noble profession all over the world. Doctors of the past were treated like God and people respected and had faith in them. In earlier days whatever was given, prescribed, ordered or done by the doctor was accepted by the patient without any doubt or suspicion. If any complication or undesirable side effect resulted, it was accepted by all concerned. Now the circumstances have changed altogether. The doctor-patient relationship has undergone a transition in the past few decades. Because of sustained campaign in media and also due to malpractice by some doctors, faith is being replaced by suspicion. Health professionals are increasingly viewed as just providers of service for consideration. The number of medical errors are increasing day by day.⁽¹⁾ According to a report by WHO 1 in 10 subjects suffer iatrogenic diseases.⁽²⁾ Monetary gains have led to the deterioration in the standard of patient care.

A doctor owes a certain duties towards his patient and a breach of any of these duties gives a cause of action of negligence against the doctor. Mistakes occur in every profession, as it does in life. Unfortunately, in the health profession mistakes could result in serious consequences for the patient and which in turn may lead the patient to seek help from a legally competent body.

In India, earlier (before 1995) the remedy for medical negligence was available only under the Law of Tort, the aggrieved patients did not have any effective adjudicative body for getting their grievances redressed.

Finally, it was on 13th November 1995 that the honorable Supreme Court of India delivered judgment on application of CPA (1986) to the medical/dental

profession, hospitals, dispensaries, nursing homes, and other health care related services.⁽³⁾ This act empowers the patient to file law-suits (in case of perceived negligence) against the concerned doctor/dentist in consumer courts.

Six basic rights were given to consumers, under this Act to get themselves redressed by the Consumer Forum. The given rights are (1) Right to safety (2) Right to information (3) Right to choose (4) Right to be heard (5) Right to be redressed (6) Right to education and these rights can be exercised in the Consumer Forum if something goes against the rights of consumers. CPA has been formulated to be customer friendly, as there is no court fee payment, the person can plead their own case, and the decision is taken within 3–6 months.

There are several studies in the literature that have assessed knowledge about CPA among healthcare professional but no such study is done among the patients or general public. Since this act is formulated only for the benefit of consumers so it is important to find out whether people are aware of such legislation. Hence this study was undertaken to find the awareness among the patients regarding CPA.

Materials and Methods

The present study was a Cross-sectional survey carried out in SDM college of Dental Science and Hospital, Dharwad, Karnataka, India.

Study Population: The study subjects comprised of adult population of 18 years age and above attending the out-patient department of SDM college of Dental Science and Hospital. A total of 330 patients were interviewed.

Ethical approval: The ethical clearance for the present study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of SDM College of Dental Sciences & Hospital, Dharwad.

Criteria for selection of participants

Inclusion Criteria:

- People who were above 18 years of age.
- Those who were willing to participate in the study and gave informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria:

- People who refused to participate in the study.
- People who could not comprehend the questions of the study despite the assistance.

Pilot Study for calculating study sample and Pre-testing of Questionnaire:

A pilot study was conducted on 30 subjects to determine the sample size and also to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was first prepared in English language and later translated to Kannada (local language). The Kannada version was again translated back to English to check for language reliability. The reliability analysis of the questionnaire was done using Split half reliability. After doing the calculation the agreement revealed that the reliability was 0.8692 and the sample size of 330 was obtained.

Sampling selection: The study participants were randomly selected who visited the college.

Research tool: The data was collected with the help of structured questionnaire through interview by a single researcher. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions. The questionnaire was based on knowledge and awareness of dentists about Consumer Protection act. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the whole process of collection of data and its analysis.

Statistical analysis: After collection of data, the data was entered in Microsoft excel 2010, The data was analyzed using SPSS version 11 software. Descriptive statistics were obtained and percentage distribution of responses to questions were calculated. The individual scores were summed up to yield a total score. The participant's total score was a simple sum of responses. Categorization of scores was done at three levels—low (0–4), medium (5–8) and high (9–12). The Mann Whitney U test and Chi-square test were used as tests of significance for statistical evaluation. The significance was set at $P \leq 0.05$.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of study subjects according to age groups

Age groups (in years)	No. of subjects	Percentage
18-29	104	31.5
30-39	94	28.5
40-49	75	22.5

50-59	35	10.6
60 and above	22	6.7
Total	330	100

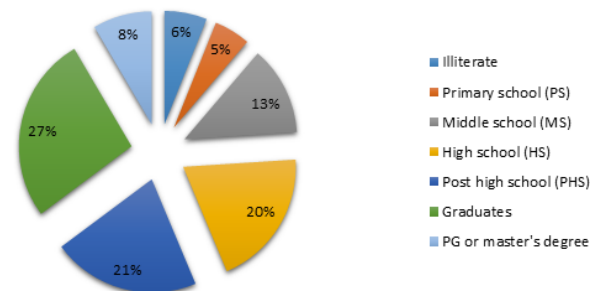
Among 330 subjects, 32% were belonging to age group of 18 to 29 years. Followed by 28% from 30 to 39 years, 22% from 40 to 49 years, 11% from 50 to 59 years whereas least number of subjects (7%) from age group of 60 and above.

Table 2: Gender wise distribution of subjects

Gender	No. of subjects	Percentage
Male	195	59.1
Female	135	40.9
Total	330	100

Graph 1: Education wise distribution of study subjects

Education wise distribution of subjects



In the study the graduates constituted the maximum number (27%) followed by those who have Master's degree (20%). The illiterates (6%) and subjects who studied primary school (5%) were least in number.

Table 3: Response of subjects to various questions regarding COPRA

Question regarding CPA	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
Heard about Consumer Protection Act	62.12	37.88	
CPA is only applicable for goods (or commodities) that are purchased	18.8	32.7	48.5
CPA is applicable to medical services	36.41	9.39	54.2
CPA is applicable to dental services	30.6	12.4	57
Doctors providing treatment for free are liable under CPA	23.6	20.3	56.1
Doctors who take fee for the services they provide are liable under CPA	36.66	9.69	54.24

Do you have to pay any fees to file complain in consumer court	14.24	23.64	61.82
Can you file (or pled) a complaint without the presence of a lawyer	30	17.27	52.42
Aware of location of Consumer court	20.91	79.09	
Consumer court gives speedy redressal than civil court	35.75	6.96	56.66

Table 4: Showing responses of study subjects according to gender

Males females

Questions	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
Heard about Consumer Protection Act	71.28	28.71		48.8	51.11	
CPA is only meant for goods (or commodities) that are purchased	20	38.9	41	17.03	23.7	59.2
CPA applicable to medical services	36.41	13.33	50.25	22.22	11.11	66.66
CPA applicable to dental services						
Doctors providing treatment for free are liable under CPA	28.71	22.05	49.23	16.29	17.77	65.92
Doctors who take fee for the services they provide are liable under CPA	44.61	7.69	47.69	23.7	12.59	44.1
Have to pay any fees to file complain in consumer court	18.97	27.17	53.84	7.4	18.51	74.07
Can you file a complaint without the presence/hiring of a lawyer	32.3	25.12	42.56	26.66	5.92	67.4
Location of Consumer court	30.76	69.23		6.66	93.33	
Consumer court gives speedy redressal than civil court	43.58	8.2	48.2	25.18	5.18	69.62

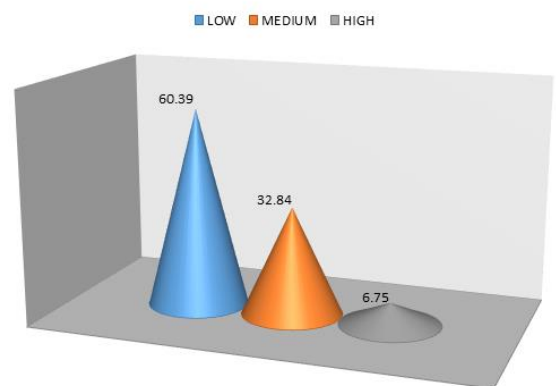
Table 5: Shows various questions and their level of significance with the age and education of subjects

Questions	Age		Education	
	Chi square	p-value	Chi square	p-value
Heard about Consumer Protection Act	4.872	0.301	122.044	0.000 *
CPA is only meant for goods (or	4.078	0.850	112.898	0.000 *

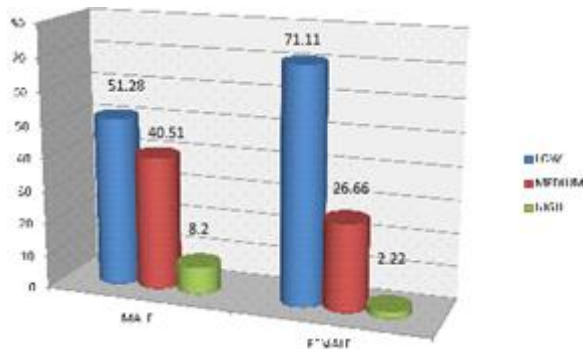
commodities) that are purchased				
CPA applicable to medical services	2.075	0.979	102.743	0.000 *
CPA applicable to dental services	7.071	0.529	91.255	0.000 *
Doctors providing treatment for free are liable under CPA	3.330	0.912	91.124	0.000 *
Doctors who take fee for the services they provide are liable under CPA	3.842	0.871	100.137	0.000 *
Have to pay any fees to file complain in consumer court	12.562	0.128	53.516	0.000 *
Can you file a complaint without the presence/hiring of a lawyer	7.237	0.511	98.342	0.000 *
Time limit to a file a complain against concerned doctor	15.786	0.201	44.961	0.000 *
Aware of location of nearest /nearby Consumer court	5.652	0.227	32.944	0.000 *
Location of consumer court at different levels	19.954	0.068	118.740	0.000 *
Consumer court provides speedy redressal as compared to consumer court	9.300	0.318	94.553	0.000 *

From the above table it is clear that all the question showed statistical significance with education whereas no question had association with age.

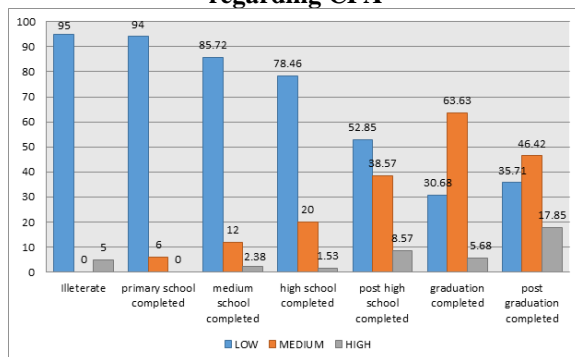
Graph 2: Grading/categorization of study participants on the basis scores (low/ medium /high) Level of knowledge



Of the total 330 subjects, majority (60%) had low level of knowledge (scored 0-4), 32% had moderate level (scored 5-8) and only 6% have high level of knowledge (scored 9 and above).

Graph 3: Gender wise comparison of knowledge regarding CPA

The number of males (8.2%) with high level of knowledge was greater than the males (2.22%) whereas the number of females (71%) with low level of knowledge were more than male (51%).

Graph 4: Education wise comparison of knowledge regarding CPA

From the above graph it is clear that illiterates and people who studied till matric and below had low level of knowledge regarding CPA. People having Moderate level of knowledge were greatest in graduates group. And people with high level of knowledge were greatest in post-graduates.

Discussion

Negligence in the medical world has assumed great importance in relation to the medical malpractices suits. To safeguard the interests of consumers, countries worldwide have developed Consumer protection organizations. Health care services, whenever purchased by receivers are also expected to provide consumer satisfaction.

The enactment of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, is a milestone in the history of socio-economic legislation in India. It provides protection to the rights of consumers and redressal of consumer disputes. Healthcare profession was included within its ambit in 1995.

This study is the one of first to assess the knowledge about CPA among the patients. The present study revealed that knowledge about consumer protection act

among study subjects was low. 62% of the study participants have heard about CPA but only one-third (30%) of the study population were aware of the fact that CPA is applicable to dental services also. Majority of the subjects thought that consumer protection act is only applicable to goods or commodities that are purchased.

The knowledge about CPA was higher in males than females. This finding was contradictory with the results of study done by Prasad S et al.⁽⁴⁾ It may be because the study population had the same occupation (all were dental professionals). Whereas in the present study people of different occupation were included so this may be the reason for unmatched findings. Common man are more indulged in business that is selling and purchasing of goods so that could be one of the reason they were more aware about CPA than females.

The present study found that subjects with higher education (graduates and post-graduates) were more aware about CPA as compared to those who were illiterates or who studied till high school only. This finding is similar to the findings of the study by Prasad et al.⁽⁴⁾ where post graduates were more aware than undergraduates. This may be attributed to the fact that with the increase in knowledge, awareness also increases.

It was also surprising to note that majority of the participants said that in case of medical negligence they would report to the police station instead of approaching lawyer or to consumer court. This shows that even after 21 years of its enactment CPA has not gained its due importance among the general population. This can be attributed to lack of publicity on consumer protection act.

In the present study none of the subjects knew correct time limit within which patient can sue the concerned doctor.

Only 20% of participants knew that if they were given free treatment and later if any complication arises because of treatment then in such cases they cannot lodge a complaint against the concerned doctor in consumer forum.

Data reported in this study cannot be generalized because of smaller sample size were selected into study. Further research studies on a larger sample taking general public and for a longer period are required for better understanding the knowledge of people regarding consumer protection act.

Conclusion

The present study results revealed that majority of the study population were aware of consumer protection act. But there knowledge on CPA was low. Only one-third of study population knew that CPA is also applicable to dentistry.

Males had significantly more knowledge on CPA when compared to females.

Also subjects with higher education (graduates and post-graduates) were more aware about CPA as

compared to those who were illiterates or who studied till high school only.

The CPA is formulated to benefit the consumer of goods and Health services; there is no use of such beneficial legislation if the general public is unaware of it despite its existence.

So there is a need to raise the awareness among public regarding consumer protection act this will also ensure that a good quality of service is being provided to them.

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