

## Original Research

### Consumer Protection Act & It's Implications

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#### ABSTRACT:

**Objectives:** A study was conducted with the purpose to assess the knowledge and attitude towards Consumer Protection Act and its implications amongst Medical and Dental undergraduates of Punjab. **Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted among all the medical and Dental undergraduate of Punjab. A self-administered structured questionnaire consisting of 15 items was used to assess their knowledge and attitude regarding Consumer Protection Act and its implications. These questions were tested among a convenience sample of 10 students, who were interviewed to gain feedback on the overall acceptability of the questionnaire in terms of length and language clarity. **Results:** Demographic data showed majority of the respondents were females (60.10%). Most of them were dental undergraduates (61.6%). Majority of respondents belong to Final year. Majority of respondents are aware of objectives of CPA (88.9%) and only (19.8%) are aware about the location of consumer forums area. Majority of respondents are aware of 6R's of Consumer Protection Act- Right to be Protected, right to be Informed, right to be Assured, right to seek Redressal, right to be heard, Right to Consumer education (71.6%). 66.7% respondents are not aware of maximum time period to file a case. 98.8% inform the patient in case of mishap. Majority of them (96.3%) ask the participant to sign an informed consent before the treatment starts. 74.1% respondents are aware of the Informed Consent key information. **Conclusion:** Majority of students are aware of Consumer Protection Act and informed consent but majority of them are unaware of claims and location of Consumer Protection forums near their area.

**Keywords:** attitude; students; Consumer Protection Act; informed consent; knowledge.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The practice of medicine in India has undergone considerable change during the last five decades effecting delivery of health in both positive and negative directions. As a result, it was felt that medical treatment should also be made answerable.<sup>1</sup> Finally, it was on 13th November 1995 that the Supreme Court of India gave judgment on application of CPA, 1986 to the medical/ dental profession, hospitals, dispensaries, nursing homes, and other related services.<sup>2</sup>

This act enables the patient to file lawsuits (in case of perceived negligence) in consumer courts. It is concerned only with negligent acts. Consumer awareness is emerging in the country, concepts are changing, laws are getting updated and consumers are getting more and more demanding. So, it is essential

on the part of dental and medical health professionals to have updated and adequate knowledge and awareness about CPA to give better services and prevent consumer disputes and further procure the necessary cues for handling the litigations. Studies on awareness of health professionals and in particular of dentists about such laws, seems to be rarely reported.<sup>3-5</sup> Hence the present study was conducted with the aim to evaluate awareness regarding CPA and its implications among Medical and Dental undergraduates of Ludhiana, Punjab, India

#### METHODOLOGY

**Study design and population:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among medical and dental undergraduates of Punjab, India in the month of November 2022.

**Ethical approval**

The study protocol was reviewed by the Ethical Committee and was granted ethical clearance.

**Inclusion Criteria**

1. Dental undergraduates
2. Medical undergraduates
3. Voluntary participation

**Exclusion Criteria**

1. Incomplete Questionnaire

**Methodology**

A self-administered structured questionnaire consisting of 15 items was developed and tested among a convenience sample of 10 students, who were interviewed to gain feedback on the overall acceptability of the questionnaire in terms of length

and language clarity. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire did not require any corrections.

Cronbach coefficient was found to be 0.82, which showed an internal reliability of the questionnaire. Mean Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated as 0.86 based on the opinions expressed by a panel of five academicians. Face validity was also assessed and it was observed that 90% of the participants found the questionnaire to be easy. The questionnaire was distributed using different social media platforms (emails, WhatsApp, etc.) the information obtained was strictly kept confidential and participants were provided with the copy of correct options along with the source to clear their doubts.

**Statistical analysis:** Completed questionnaires were coded and spreadsheets were created for data entry. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 20 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

**RESULTS**

**TABLE 1: demographic profile of the study population**

Sample Characteristic	Frequency
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	30.9%
Female	60.10%
<b>Qualification</b>	
Dental	71.60%
Medical	28.4%
<b>Year Of Study</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup>	24.7%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	8.6%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.7%
4 <sup>th</sup>	33.7%
5 <sup>th</sup>	29.6%

As shown in Table 1, a total of 162 medical and dental undergraduates of Punjab participated in the survey. Demographic data showed majority of the respondents were females (60.10%). Most of them were dental undergraduates (61.6%). Majority of respondents belong to Final year.

**TABLE 2: distribution of responses regarding attitude and implications among study population**

	YES	NO
Awareness about objectives of CPA	88.9%	11.1%
Knowledge about location of consumer forums	19.8%	80.2%
Do you give patients adequate opportunity to ask questions	100%	0
Do you know 6R'S Of Consumer Protection Act	71.6%	28.4%
Do you give patient adequate opportunity to ask questions & address concern	100%	0
Do you present adequate information to allow patient to give truly informed consent	100%	0
Do you know that parents can give consent on behalf of their children who is less than 18 years of age	100%	0

Table 2 shows Attitude and Implications amongst the medical and dental undergraduates about the informed consent and Consumer Protection act. Majority of respondents are aware of objectives of CPA (88.9%) and only (19.8%) are aware about the location of

consumer forums area. Majority of respondents are aware of 6R's of Consumer Protection Act-Right to be Protected, right to be Informed, right to be Assured, right to seek Redressal, right to be heard, Right to Consumer education (71.6%).

**TABLE 3: distribution of responses regarding Knowledge of Consumer Protection Act among study population**

Sample characteristic	Frequency
<b>Awareness about the maximum time period to file a case?</b>	
Within 90 days	22.2%
Within 2 years	11.1%
Not sure	66.7%
<b>At which level a compensation claim of 25 lakhs is made?</b>	
District Level	18.5%
State Level	59.3%
National level	22.2%
<b>What should a doctor do in case of mishap?</b>	
Threaten the patient	0
Remain quiet	1.2%
Inform the patient	98.8%
<b>When should a participant be asked to sign an Informed consent?</b>	
Before treatment starts	96.3%
Some complications arise	2.5%
After the treatment is done	1.2%
<b>What is Informed Consent Key Information?</b>	
Brief	11.9%
It should provide clarity.	14%
Both	74.1%

Table 3 indicates Knowledge amongst the Medical and Dental undergraduates about the Consumer Protection Act.66.7% respondents are not aware of maximum time period to file a case.98.8% inform the patient in case of mishap. Majority of them (96.3%) ask the participant to sign an informed consent before the treatment starts.74.1% respondents are aware of the Informed Consent key information.

## DISCUSSION

The current study was conducted among 162 medical and dental undergraduates of Ludhiana, Punjab, India to assess their knowledge and attitude towards Consumer Protection Act and Informed Consent. Our study revealed that knowledge regarding the aims and objectives of CPA and its application in regard to our field of practice is limited, similar to studies conducted by Anil et al.<sup>6</sup> and Jasuma et al.<sup>7</sup> In other study, 71.6% of the study participants were under the impression that there was no time limit for a complaint to be filed by a patient.<sup>8</sup> In current study, 66.7% were aware of the time limit for a complaint to be filed by patient. In one study, it was found that only 75% of the practitioners used to take consent before giving treatment to the patient.<sup>9</sup> In our study, 96.3% students take consent before giving treatment. In one study, 49.6% of medical professionals and 50.4% of dental professionals were aware about the Consumer Protection Act.<sup>10</sup> In our study, 71.6% and 28.4% are aware about the Consumer Protection Act. In our study 60.10% are females. In other study by Gupta VV et al 41% are females.<sup>11</sup> In our study, 88.9% of the study are aware of Consumer Protection Act. In other study by Gupta VV et al, 22.4% are aware about Consumer Protection Act. However, there are certain limitations worth mentioning. First of all, our study is a cross-sectional study with relatively small sample size and hence it is difficult to generalize the findings for the entire country. Since it was a questionnaire study,

knowledge and awareness regarding CPA among respondents may or may not be predicted, reflecting the inherent limitations of such studies. Further studies are warranted to investigate the knowledge, attitude and awareness pertaining to the CPA by some better tools. It is also emphasized that studies comparing the knowledge of dental with medical professionals should also be conducted.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the observation of study, following conclusions were made. Majority of participants are aware of Consumer Protection Act and Informed consent but most of them are unaware of the claims and location of Consumer Protection forums near their area. Therefore, dental and medical undergraduates need to update their knowledge and understanding on CPA and its amendments to be on a legally safer side. Following recommendations are put forth-Compulsory continued medical education (CME) programs on CPA should be arranged frequently

Awareness should be spread about professional indemnity claim Dental professionals should internalize quality-assured health standards in their routine professional duties, to ensure protection of customer rights

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