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## Original Review Article

### Evaluation of Perception of Doctors and Hospital Administrators on Their Experience of Handling Medicolegal Cases

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#### Key words

Hospital Administrators,  
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Forensic Laboratory  
Services.

#### Abstract

**Introduction:** The physicians need to have the appropriate knowledge in regards to their roles and responsibilities towards managing medicolegal cases to aid in court of law towards justice to the survivor/injured as the handling Medico-legal case (MLC) are an integral part of emergency medical services in day-to-day medical practice at the Government hospitals as well as private clinics. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional questionnaire-based pilot study in which feedback from the 51 doctors working at casualty, OBGY department or forensic department on their experience of handling medicolegal cases were taken on prevalidated feedback questionnaire. **Results & discussion:** In our study, about 32 doctors (62.74%) were having experience of handling medicolegal cases between 1 to 3 years. The prevalidated, structured questionnaire feedback from doctors shows positive inclination on suggestions/ improvements such as hands on training in UG curriculum, medicolegal training, standard formats and uniform guidelines on handling medicolegal cases, team approach by concerned experts in managing the medicolegal case with prime involvement of forensic experts and establishment of clinical forensic medicine department with clinical forensic laboratory services for bedside quantitative & qualitative toxicological and forensic analysis on material evidence from patients in medicolegal cases. **Conclusion:** The improvement and innovations including setting up a Clinical Forensic Medicine department with clinical forensic laboratory services is need of hour for improving results on material evidences towards aiding justice in court of law.

#### 1. Introduction

Medico-legal case (MLC) management is the integral part of emergency medical services at the hospitals

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and private clinics.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the clinicians need to have the appropriate knowledge of their roles and responsibilities in managing these medicolegal and other cases to help in court of law towards justice to the survivor/ injured.<sup>2</sup> Proper medicolegal evaluation, management and appropriate medical documentation of such medico legal cases should be given utmost importance to minimize legal complications and to ensure legal justice providing necessary benefits to the Next of Kin.<sup>3</sup> Hence, appropriate knowledge, skills, expertise, awareness and experience on handling medicolegal cases needed for the patientcare-service providing doctors including residents, practitioners, clinicians, faculty and hospital administrators.

The registered medical practitioner is well trained and efficient in providing competent medical management to needy. But many times, they are uncomfortable, unwilling or unable to deliver the patient care with a competent medicolegal services to the patients. Handling and documenting the medico legal cases is one of the important works at hospital and it need to be done accurately, completely, timely and comprehensively.<sup>4</sup> Sample collection as evidence is important towards giving justice to survivor/injured.<sup>5</sup> Different legal procedures and protocols are being followed by different states in managing medicolegal cases, as the law and order is a state subject. Doctors need to be acquainted with medicolegal protocols, guidelines and procedures in managing medicolegal cases that are in practice in the concerned state in which they are serving.<sup>6</sup>

The common medico legal cases brought to hospitals are assault (physical violence, blunt trauma, etc.); accidents like Road Traffic Accidents (RTA), railway accidents, aviation accidents, industrial accidents etc.; domestic violence cases and battered baby cases; burn/ scald injuries, fire/ smoke, electrocution, lightening injuries cases; Drug abuse & drug intoxication; various types of poisoning cases; patient in coma with unknown history; radiation & chemical injuries; criminal abortions; sexual abuse cases, natural/ unnatural sexual offences; cases of asphyxia consequent to suffocation, drowning, ligature compression over neck, traumatic asphyxia, etc.; operation table deaths, therapeutic misadventures, death in police custody; injury / death in orphanages, children home, shelter home; unnatural deaths; death due to animal bite including snake bite or scorpion, dog bite; fire arm injuries; brought dead/ found dead, patient brought to hospital.<sup>7,8</sup> The study objectives

were to evaluate perception of doctors and hospital administrators on experience of dealing with medicolegal cases and need of expertise antemortem forensic services improvements. It aims to understand the patient care issues and the possible innovations in the system to facilitate legal aid.

## 2. Material & Methods:

It was a cross-sectional questionnaire-based pilot study. In this study, feedback from the doctors working at casualty, emergency handling departments, OBGY department and forensic department including hospital administrators at tertiary care institutions on their experience of handling medicolegal cases were taken on prevalidated feedback questionnaire after taking written informed consent. Purposive sampling method was used so as to cover the different departments of the hospital such as forensic, casualty, surgery, medicine, orthopedics, gynecology, pediatrics. The doctors having experience of handling medicolegal cases minimum of 06 (six) months were included into the study. Total fifty-one (51) subjects' feedback taken, who were given voluntarily willingness to participate in the study. The response on prevalidated feedback questionnaire with closed ended questions were rated on five-point Likert scale. The data was tabulated and analysed for number and percentage.

## 3. Results:

Analysis of the 51 doctors (resident)/ medical officers/ faculty-cum-administrators' feedback was done. It was found that the maximum doctors [35 (68.63%)] handle the medicolegal cases daily. The most of doctors [32 (62.74%)] in this study were having experience of handling medicolegal cases between 1 to 3 years. The most of doctors [48 (94.12%)] in this study are having appropriate essential training & experience of handling medicolegal cases. The most of doctors [46 (90.20%)] in this study are having essential awareness on the handling medicolegal cases. The most of doctors [44 (86.27%)] in this study are having essential awareness on the various medicolegal documentation procedures. The results on questionnaire feedback rating on suggestions/ changes needed in handling medicolegal cases on various aspects represented in the [graph no. 1](#) and percent distribution shown in [graph no. 2](#).

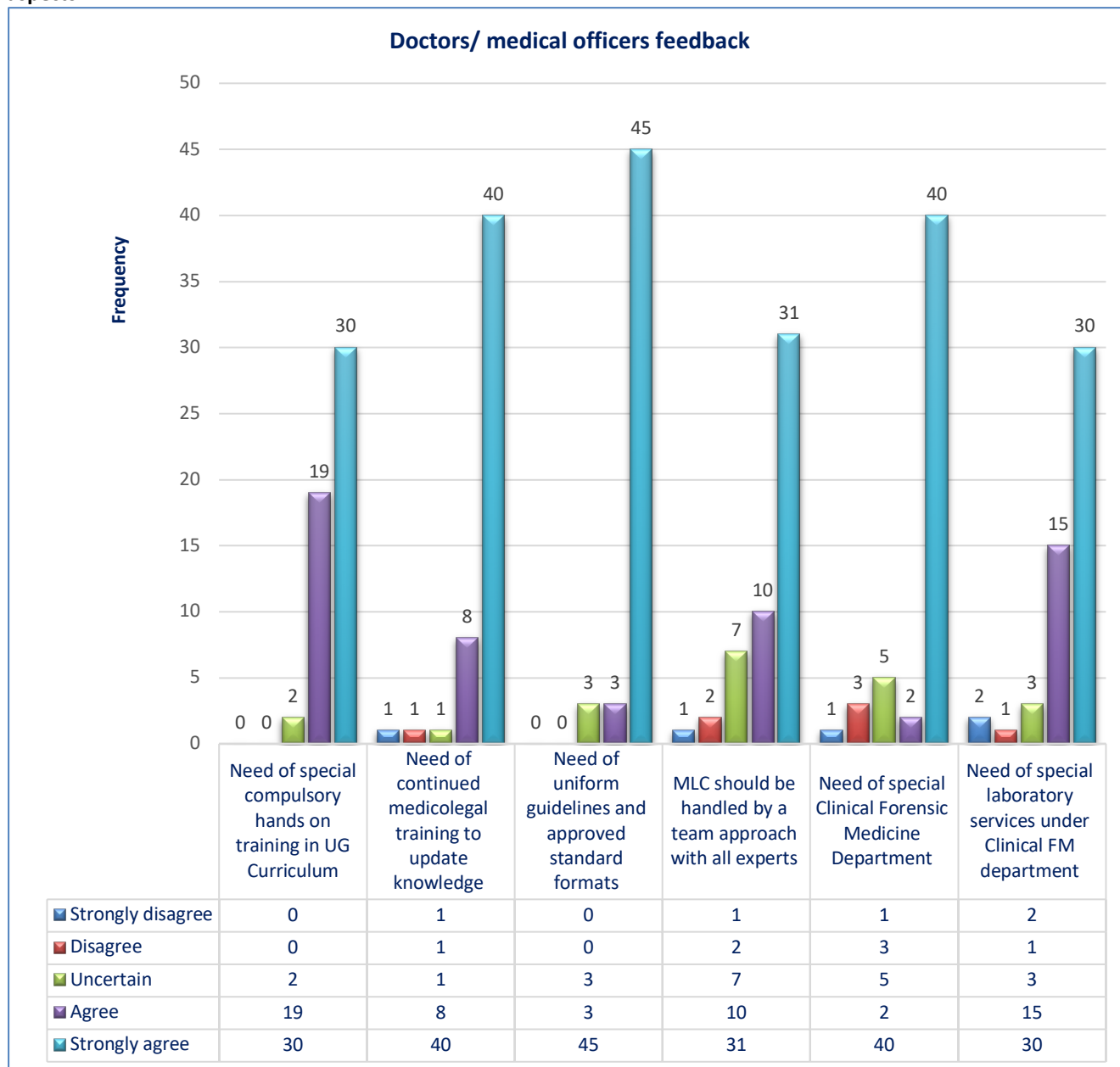
## 4. Discussion:

In the present study, most of the doctors shows positive inclination on suggestions/

improvements. 30 doctors (58.82 %) strongly agree that there is need of special compulsory hands on training in handling various medicolegal cases in undergraduate academic curriculum. 40 doctors (78.43%) strongly agree that there is need of continued medicolegal training to update knowledge in handling

various medicolegal cases to deal medicolegal cases efficiently. 45 doctors (88.24%) strongly agree that there is need of standard uniform guidelines and approved standard formats for documentation of medicolegal cases at hospitals.

**Graph no. 1: Questionnaire feedback rating on suggestions/ changes needed in handling medicolegal cases on various aspects.**



**Interpretation of graph findings:** It was found that the most of the doctors shows positive inclination on suggestions.

31 doctors (60.78%) strongly agree that the medicolegal cases should be handled by a team approach with all experts from concerned departments such as Forensic Medicine and Obstetrics & Gynecology, pediatrics, medicine, surgery department

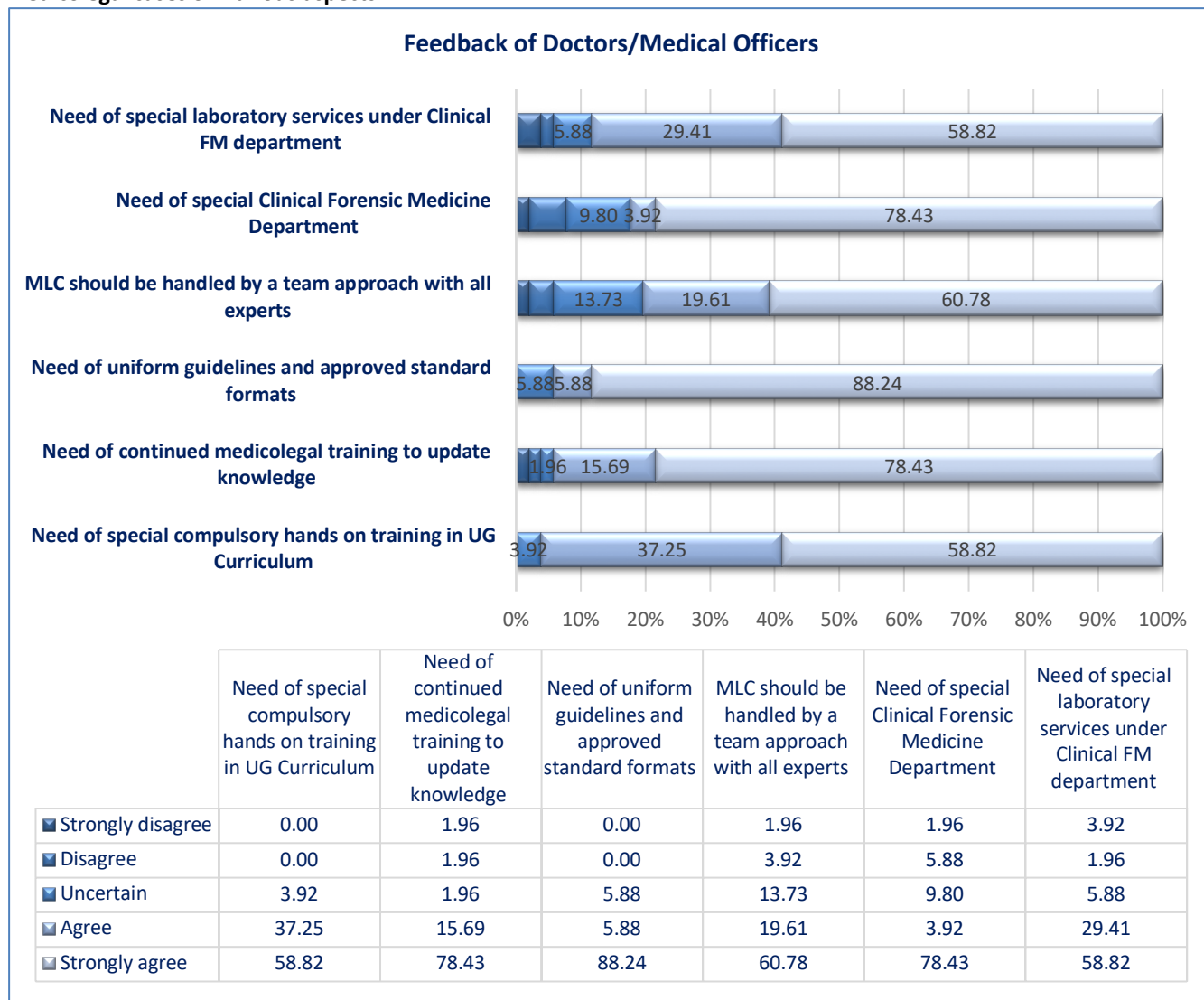
(as needed) to handle various medicolegal cases at hospital. 40 doctors (78.43 %) strongly agree that in addition to team approach in handling medicolegal cases, there is need of special Clinical Forensic Medicine Department with concerned experts to

handle various medicolegal cases efficiently to aid Casualty services in hospital towards justice in court of law.

30 doctors (58.82 %) strongly agree that there is need of special laboratory services under clinical forensic medicine department facilitating the secure

evidence collection and maintaining chain of custody with early, speedy reports in various medicolegal evidence collection/ sampling. There are multiple quantitative studies undertaken by various researchers<sup>8-13</sup> on the medico legal cases, and very few studies<sup>3,5</sup>

**Graph no. 2: The percentage distribution of the questionnaire feedback rating on suggestions/ changes needed in handling medicolegal cases on various aspects.**



There were multiple quantitative studies undertaken by various researchers<sup>8-13</sup> on the medico legal cases, and very few studies<sup>3,5,7</sup> were done on the qualitative part with assessment of awareness of doctors. A study on medicolegal cases in various hospitals (2 municipals, 2 Government and 2 private hospitals) of Mumbai by Rege et al (2011) done for understanding the medicolegal procedures. The authors concluded that there was ambiguity in the understanding the MLC amongst the doctors. Most of

the health care professional were looking at MLC as a burden, having fear of court-call and doing a defensive practice of medicine. Authors recommended for the standard operating procedure in the context of doctors, nurses and police and their respective medicolegal roles.<sup>3</sup>

Management of Medico-legal case (MLC) and preparing reports are the integral part of casualty medical services in the Clinical Forensic Medicine and emergency departments. The doctors need to have the

appropriate knowledge about handling medicolegal cases and their roles and responsibilities in management of medicolegal cases in aiding legal justice. Hence, the training and awareness workshops are necessary for the medical practitioners towards handling medicolegal cases efficiently and competently.<sup>14-16</sup> The uniform standard format in handling medicolegal cases may be useful to yield necessary medicolegal information to aid in administration of justice.

In the present study, the structured questionnaire feedback from doctors gives positive opinion on the need of the standard uniform guidelines and approved standard formats for documentation of medicolegal cases at hospitals.<sup>12,16,17</sup> Most of the doctors shows **positive inclination** on suggestions/improvements such as hands on training in UG curriculum, medicolegal training<sup>18</sup>, standard formats and uniform guidelines, team approach by concerned experts, prime involvement of forensic experts and establishment of clinical forensic medicine department with necessary clinical forensic laboratory services for bedside quantitative & qualitative toxicological and forensic analysis of material evidence from patients in medicolegal cases.

The sound and perfect, updated knowledge on various medicolegal issues and handling medicolegal cases competently are very much needed to maintain sound doctor-patient relationship and help to safeguard our own and patient's interest.<sup>19</sup>

## 5. Conclusion:

There is need of strict implementation of competency based medical education curriculum for undergraduates with inculcating the practices of handling medicolegal cases with imparting practical bedside hands on knowledge in the wards. There is need of continued medicolegal training to update knowledge in handling various medicolegal cases to deal medicolegal cases efficiently.

There should be uniform standard operational guidelines and approved standard formats for documentation of medicolegal cases at hospital. Team approach with all experts from concerned departments such as Forensic Medicine and Obstetrics & Gynecology, pediatrics, medicine, surgery department (as needed) to handle various medicolegal cases at hospital should be followed.

Efficient and competent management of Medico-legal case (MLC) will facilitate appropriate

medicolegal examination of the patient/ subjects/ survivor/ accused, collection of appropriate material evidence, better medicolegal documentation and maintenance of proper chain of custody in medicolegal material evidence handover to aid to justice in court of law.

## 6. Recommendations:

The authors recommend **team approach** with all experts from concerned departments such as Forensic Medicine and Obstetrics & Gynecology, pediatrics, medicine, surgery department (as needed) to handle various medicolegal cases at hospital at a single time rather than different examinations at different times by various experts.

There is need of hour to establish a special **Clinical Forensic Medicine Department** with concerned experts to handle various medicolegal cases efficiently to aid Casualty services in hospital towards justice in court of law.

Also, there is need of hour to establish a central **special clinical forensic laboratory** at every governmental and quasi-governmental hospitals for necessary forensic laboratory services under clinical forensic medicine department facilitating the safe, secure and confidential evidence collection reporting with maintenance of chain of custody in various medicolegal cases.

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