

# DENTISTRY: ETHICS AND PRACTICE IN NEPAL

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Nepal is a country of myth and mysticism with 33 crores of deities to relieve us from all kinds of distress, pain and sorrow. Most of us must be aware of one such deity at Bangemudha called the “Wa-Shya-Dyo” (god of tooth), a wooden log and prong a nail into it is supposed to cure the toothache. Such belief still exists in certain communal groups and they do practice such traditional methods to some extent. And there were so called faith healers who were notorious to alleviate pain by their spiritual power.

With the advent of modern dentistry, the scenario has changed. Modern dentistry with a more scientific approach was pioneered during the reign of Rana Priminister Chandra Samsher in 1920s, by Asta Man Rajbhandari of Naghal tole. It took another 30 years for the trained dentists to start practicing in Nepal and Dr. Basanta Bahadur Rajbhandari was one of the pioneer qualified dental surgeon and started his practice in 1944. Due to the increasing demand of general people and shortage of qualified manpower's, traditional dental practitioners (Dental Quackery), who have taken it up as a family vocation, grew up tremendously. The Question of ethical practice in dentistry at that moment was never an issue. Ignorance of the general regulations upon the hazards of dentistry was an added factor. Beyond and even within the valley, toothache was much of a game of the faith healer.

Half a century later, in the 21st century, the whole scenario of dentistry has completely changed through out the world. With the advent of new technologies and sophisticated gadgets, there is a big revolution in the treatment aspect as well. With three dental colleges and hospitals and more than

200 dentists at present, dentistry in Nepal is stepping ahead. Number of qualified dentists are increasing tremendously and multiplying every year and unaccountable infiltration of foreign dentists has added to the figure. Even though the government has made provision to allot one dental surgeon in every zonal hospital, the posts are still vacant in many hospitals. The trained health assistants are providing the primary dental care through the health posts and people are still deprived of quality dental services outside the valley, where as more than 80% of the dentists are concentrated within the valley. With this isolation of local and foreign manpower into the valley and other few satellite cities, and with more than 100 upcoming qualified dentists in every year, it has given rise to lots of confusion regarding healthy and ethical dental practice in Nepal and the problem could be enormous in coming future if not systematized and discussed at present. Otherwise we and the upcoming dentists will be the sufferer. The problems that should be considered and need immediate attentions are:

- i) Confusion regarding temporary and permanent registration in NMC.
- ii) Licensing examination.
- iii) Control over the malpractice by the non-professionals.
- iv) Control over the unprofessional acts and misconducts by the qualified professionals.
- v) Provision for internship in Nepal.
- vi) Infiltration of foreign dentist – rules and regulations to accommodate them in our practice.

vii) Quality control of the dental colleges.

Thus keeping in mind the burning issues like quality service and ethical practice in dentistry, we have inquired few responsible persons like the registrar of NMC, president of NDA, chairman of ethical committee of NMC to inform us of the various measures being taken towards the upliftment of the whole dental profession and the dental professionals.

As we all dental professionals, come under the umbrella of the NMC, we put forth a few queries to the registrar of NMC regarding its role and objectives. The registrar of NMC explained the following measures being taken by NMC to uplift the quality of medical and dental service and to make the medical profession more organized.

- (a) Control to maintain the optimum standard of the medical and dental colleagues.
- (b) Conduct licensing examination for the professionals to get registered in NMC and allow them to start their independent practice.
- (c) Control over the unprofessional actions and conducts carried out by the qualified professionals.

With three dental colleges at present and few more to open in coming years, according to the registrar, NMC, is taking a keen interest to optimize the standard of dental colleges. Inspection team formed by the members of NMC regularly monitors the infrastructure of the colleges and checks whether the colleges are following the norms of NMC or not. On recommendation of inspection team, NMC allots the number of seats each year in different colleges. But due to the lack of mutual co-ordination among NMC, university and higher education council, the colleges are under the impression of misguidance or confusion. Chairman of ethical committee of NMC demands a need of 'Apex body', a supervision team comprising of representatives from NMC, universities and higher education

council, which will monitor and standardize the colleagues.

With the influx of fresh dentists, provision for internship for them is a big problem. Despite lack of enough infrastructure in any hospital to train an internee, NMC has given permission to some government and private hospitals to conduct internship in dental surgery. The registrar of NMC stresses that as internship is a part of academic education, it is to be completed from the college they graduate but if under any circumstance they could not do internship from their colleges they can peruse in any hospital permitted by the health ministry and recommended by the medical council. A team of doctors from Health Ministry and NMC supervises the hospitals and if the necessary infrastructure is available, on recommendation from inspection team, the hospitals are permitted to take up an internee for the allotted period of time. Graduates from the recognized universities can obtain provisional registration. An internee or a doctor with provisional registration could practice under the supervision but not independently. The president of NDA agrees that the allotted hospitals do not have the necessary infrastructure but certain colleges in Russia, China or Philippine do not have a provision for internship at all. As it is required by the NMC to complete the internship before they could register as capable doctors, some provision has to be made considering the welfare and future of such doctors.

This all being very true, how is it going to lead us to control over the quality dental services which is the primary intention? The registrar of NMC explains that the candidates who have received provisional registration could get temporary registration after passing the licensing examination (to be conducted from Chaitra 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> 2058) which is as good as permanent registration and allows them to have an independent practice. After 2 years of general practice, permanent registration is granted to them except for those doctors who studied under government scholarship scheme. Those doctors have

to work compulsorily for 2 years in the hospital specified by the health ministry.

Lots of foreign dentists are inflowing into the country and they are having independent practice without following the norms of NMC. There is no check to control over it. Are there any measures being taken to control over the unaccountable infiltration of foreign dentists by the NMC and what are the provisions under which they could practice in our country? Upon our query, the registrar of NMC makes it clear that every foreign doctor has to get registered temporarily in NMC before they start their practice in Nepal. Every foreign doctor has to sit for the licensing exam that will be conducted in the form of an interview on Wednesday every week. The foreign doctors have to apply first with all credentials along with recommendation from the recognized health institutes or hospitals they are supposed to work for. Such doctors are not allowed to work in any other hospital or to have an independent practice.

What we all are talking about is the control over the quality dental services provided by the qualified dental surgeons but what about the malpractice by the unqualified or non – professionals which is increasing day by day? Is there any governing body to stop them? On one side, we are focusing on quality dental service to the public but on the other hand, traditional dental practitioners (dental quackery) is flourishing high. With attractive and lucrative slogans like “यहाँ अमेरिकन मेशीनद्वारा दाँत सफा गरिन्छ, यहाँ आधुनिक जापानी प्रविधिबाट दाँत बनाइन्छ” they are just simply misleading the public. And in this era of HIV and Hepatitis B, are these dental quacks doing a justice to their patients? In spite of providing dental cure to the ignorant public, they, god forbid, might be spreading such untreatable and other communicable diseases. Unfortunately, the bigger wonder is, the government has kept both its eyes and ears closed. Is the government not responsible for providing quality health services to the general public? The registrar of NMC regrets the facts and tries to escape saying that under drug Act and regulation 2035, the paramedics and health auxiliaries are allowed to practice as per the norms

of the paramedic council but any actions or complaints against them is to be made to the paramedic council which is an authorized governing body to look after them. Since the traditional dental practice has come as a family vocation, they do not come under paramedics. Dental Auxiliaries e. g. Dental Chair side assistants and dental hygienists are also practicing independently which is strictly against the norms of CTEVT (Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training). CTEVT is a body which has acquired permission from the government to conduct technical and vocational training. The president of NDA is strictly against the vocational training in health sector. In his opinion, vocational training is simply a skill learning device, which is just learning an art but not science, where as dentistry is both an art and science. An artful act without scientific basis in health science could be hazardous to the patient. Both academic knowledge and skill development are equally important which complements one another to give quality dental service. According to the president of NDA, if any unprofessional acts are conducted by the dental auxiliaries, it is the responsibility of the CTEVT to take action against them.

Have you not heard the attractive, commercial advertisement of dental clinics and health institutes run by few of our qualified dentists and some non-professionals in FMs and daily news paper? Sign boards that advertises their clinical services and sizes bigger than that of any movie publicity, could be seen in any corner of the street. These are the acts undoubtedly, against the code of ethics of NMC people have gone to such an extreme that some professionals/nonprofessionals mention the undesigned degree on their signboards just to cheat the poor helpless public. As a rule, specialists have to submit their designated certificates/degrees/diploma/training to NMC to get it verified. Even when notified, are there any measures being taken by NMC to control over the unprofessional acts and misconducts by the qualified professionals? According to the code of ethics, following activities are considered unprofessional acts and misconducts.

- Medical/dental practitioners should use a

18"x14" signboard and write his name, NMC No., Qualification, titles. The letter should be in blue on a white background.

- It is improper to affix a sign board in a chemist's shop.
- Medical/dental practitioner should not encourage any direct or indirect advertisement in any form of media.

Failing to obey such rules, they are liable for penalty. It is the "professional conduct and health committee" of NMC who actually looks after any violation of code of ethics and recommends penalty depending upon the severity of misconduct. NMC has recently co-ordinated with the Central District Officers (CDOs) of all 75 districts and medical superintendents of zonal hospitals. CDOs have been empowered to take action against any unregistered practitioners and against those who have involved in unprofessional acts and misconducts.

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Needless to say, NMC is trying its best to make the health profession a truly and purely service motive and to facilitate quality health services in easy and affordable manners to the general public. But what could be done for the welfare of the dentists, for the promotion of oral health in Nepal and for the upliftment of the whole dental profession? The president of NDA stresses the urgent need of "Nepal Dental Council" and he informs us that dental act is being formed. It is definitely an optimistic indication that the government has granted permission, in principle, to open the dental council. Once the dental council is formed, it is for the national welfare in the field of oral health, not simply for the dentists. Besides, National Oral Health Policy has recently been formed which is going to involve the government, INGOs and NGOs to uplift the oral health of people from the grass root level. Let's hope, the day is not very far when every body considers the dental profession as a noble profession.