



## Knowledge of Medical Students about the Charter of Patients' Rights: A Systematic Review

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### Abstract

**Background:** Respect for patients' rights in medical centers is essential. It is sometimes overlooked due to the ignorance and negligence of the medical staff. This study aimed to investigate the knowledge of Iranian medical students about patients' rights and examine its underlying factors.

**Materials and Methods:** In this systematic review, a search of online databases (Medline, EMBASE, Scopus, Web of Science, Magiran, SID, CIVILICA, and Google Scholar search engine) was conducted for relevant studies with no time limit up to April 2022. Two reviewers evaluated the quality of eligible studies and carried out the selection procedure. The quality of the information was evaluated using the Newcastle Ottawa scale.

**Results:** Finally, 11 studies (n=3,208 medical students) were selected. The knowledge of patients' rights in medical students was estimated as moderate (range: 27.7-81.16%). The mean score of students' knowledge about patients' rights was  $14.95 \pm 2.09$  out of 18 (moderate score). There was a statistically significant relationship between students' knowledge of the Charter of Patients' Rights and the variables of age, gender, degree, and field of study. These groups had the lowest level of knowledge: men, students over 25 years, students between 21 and 22 years, and dental and emergency medical students ( $P < 0.05$ ). Students of the associate of science degree had the lowest score, and residency students had the highest score in patients' rights awareness.

**Conclusion:** Based on the findings, the level of knowledge of medical students about the Charter of Patients' Rights was moderate. It is necessary to increase their awareness by developing educational plans for all medical students, especially dental, emergency, and male students.

**Key Words:** Iran, Patients' right, Medical Students, Systematic Review, Knowledge.

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## 1- INTRODUCTION

Patients' rights are pivotal in defining the standards of clinical services and are one of the substantial indicators of the quality of services in the health system. In 2002, for the first time in Iran, the Charter of Patients' Rights was drafted and announced by the Deputy Minister of Health. In November 2009, a comprehensive and detailed charter of patients' rights was compiled in Iran to describe patients' rights and observe ethical treatment standards and was announced by the Minister of Health to the affiliated centers (1). The Charter of Patients' Rights is the defense of human rights to preserve human dignity and honor and ensure that at times of illness, especially in medical emergencies, people receive adequate care without discrimination in age, physical characteristics, and financial situation in a respectful and high-quality environment (2). In Iran, the comprehensive charter of patients' rights has five general axes and 37 clauses along with insights, values, and a final note (1). Although the compilation and promulgation of the Charter of Patients' Rights is a valuable step to fulfilling the rights of patients, studies indicate that the observance of patients' rights in health centers varies.

Studies by Mosadegh Rad et al. (3), Zarei et al. (4), and Basiri Moghadam et al. (5) have reported moderate knowledge of Patients' Rights. Satisfaction was reported at 53% by Voskuee Ashkuri et al. (6), and 56.2% by Malekshahi (7). Evidence shows that observing legal and ethical aspects by hospital staff was under average or not desirable (8). Also, the patients report that the provisions of this charter are not observed by nurses, physicians, and other health professionals despite their knowledge (9). Non-compliance with the Charter of Patients' Rights can endanger the health, life, and safety of patients, as well as weaken the relationship between

health care workers and patients, ultimately leading to inefficiency and inadequacy of health services and patient care (10). The professional life of medical staff is intertwined with rules and regulations, one of which is the Charter of Patients' Rights. The success of a desirable and genuine service based on the provisions of the Charter is in the hands of those with better knowledge and awareness, who, in the light of this awareness, can deal with issues in the medical environment properly (11). This review study investigated the knowledge of Iranian medical students about the Patients' Rights and the effective factors on it.

## 2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) checklist was used as the template for this review (12).

### 2-1. Eligibility criteria

**2-1-1. Participants:** Iranian medical students.

**2-1-2. Included studies:** Conducting research in Iran and research articles was the main criterion for inclusion in the study. Other inclusion criteria were the focus on knowledge of medical students towards patients' rights, being published up to April 2022, written in English or Persian, and published articles with full-text available.

**2-1-3. Exclusion criteria:** The exclusion criteria were abstracts not linked to the full article, articles written not in English or Persian, reviews or meta-analyses, letters to the editor, editorials, short reports, case reports, pilot and preliminary studies, and briefs.

### 2-2. Information sources

A systemic search of electronic databases Medline (via PubMed), EMBASE, Scopus, Web of Science, Cochrane Library,

CIVILICA, Magiran, SID, and Google Scholar search engine was conducted. The search was done independently and in duplication by two reviewers, and any disagreement between the reviews was dissolved by the supervisor.

### **2-3. Search**

Search words were a combination of (Patients' rights OR Patient rights) AND (Knowledge OR Awareness) AND (Students OR Medical students OR University students).

### **2-4. Study selection**

Database search was done for possible studies, study abstracts were screened for eligible studies, full-text articles were obtained and assessed, and a final list of included studies was made. This process was done independently and in duplication by two reviewers, and any disagreement was resolved by the third reviewer. References were organized and managed using EndNote software (version X8).

### **2-5. Data collection process**

A researcher form was developed and followed for each study. Two reviewers collected the data independently. The collected data were combined and compared for accuracy, and any discrepancies were solved by a third reviewer.

### **2-6. Risk of bias in individual studies**

The quality of selected articles was assessed using the Newcastle Ottawa Edited Scale (13), which is a tool for assessing the quality of non-randomized studies in a systematic review and meta-analyses. This scale examines articles in terms of "selection process", "comparability", and "outcome". Based on the Newcastle-Ottawa scale, articles were rated from zero (weakest) to nine (strongest). Each study can receive up to nine points. In this study, a score of six indicated a high-quality study, and a score equal to or less than six was considered

low-quality. The assessment was done by two reviewers independently and in duplication, and any discrepancies were resolved by the third reviewer.

## **3- RESULTS**

The content of 11 articles (n=3,208 medical students) was extracted and categorized after evaluating the inclusion criteria and the quality of the articles (**Figure.1**).

**1.** A descriptive-analytical study on 270 medical students in Hamadan province in 2010 assessed the educational needs of medical students regarding the Charter of Patients' Rights. The results showed that 47% of students were not familiar with the Charter of Patients' Rights (14).

**2.** A cross-sectional descriptive study on 270 medical and paramedical students of Hamadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, examined their awareness of the Charter of Patients' Rights. The results showed that the mean awareness was 10.3+1.5 out of 17 (moderate), and 47% of students were not familiar with the Charter. Of the total students, 31% had low awareness, 53% had medium, and only 16% had high awareness. It means the awareness of most students about patients' rights was low (15).

**3.** A cross-sectional comparative study was conducted in 2012 on 330 employed nurses and 110 nursing students of the fourth semester and above at Kerman University of Medical Sciences to compare their knowledge and attitudes toward their ability to protect the patients' rights. The results showed that approximately 25% of nurses and 20% of nursing students were not aware of the patients' rights instructions in the hospital, and only 16% of nurses and 3% of students were fully familiar with the instructions. The overall attitude score in the two groups was different, meaning that nurses had a more positive attitude than students towards the

role of nurses in observing patients' rights ( $p < 0.05$ ) (16).

**4.** A descriptive cross-sectional study on 300 medical, nursing, and midwifery students of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences in 2017 examined the level of knowledge of clinical students about the patients' rights. The results showed that the clinical students' knowledge of patients' rights was moderate. The mean score of students' knowledge about patient rights was  $14.95 \pm 2.09$  out of 18. The awareness of patients' rights was estimated in 54.7% of students as moderate. Medical students had the highest awareness of patients' rights, and the nursing students had the lowest score. Also, undergraduate students had the lowest score, and residency students had the highest score in the awareness of patients' rights (17).

**5.** A descriptive-analytical study in 2009 on 266 students of clinical internship in Yazd teaching hospitals assessed the knowledge of students about patients' rights. The results showed that 35.6% of students had a low level of knowledge, 27.7% had a medium level, and 36.7% had a good level of knowledge. There was a statistically significant relationship between students' awareness of the Patients' Rights Charter and the variables of age, sex, degree, and field of study; so that the lowest level of knowledge was related to men, students over 25 years, students between 21 and 22 years, medical students, and associate's degree students. The results also showed that 62.2% of students were not aware of the Patients' Rights before the internship in the hospital (18).

**6.** A descriptive cross-sectional study on 1219 nursing and midwifery students of Iran Universities of Medical Sciences teaching hospitals in 2017 aimed to evaluate the knowledge of nursing and midwifery students about patients' rights. The results showed that the mean score of

students' awareness of the Patients' Rights Charter was  $13.54 \pm 4.45$  out of 29 (moderate). Of nursing students, 77.61% and 77.20% of midwifery students had moderate knowledge. There was no significant relationship between the academic year and students' knowledge scores (19).

**7.** A descriptive cross-sectional study on 300 clinical students of Jahrom Medical University (nursing, anesthesiology, operating room, and medical students) in 2013, aimed to evaluate the students' awareness of patients' rights among clinical students. The results showed that the mean knowledge score of students was  $14.48 \pm 3.82$  out of 29 (moderate). The differences in student scores in terms of gender and academic degree were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The mean knowledge score of female students was higher than male students. Medical students had the highest mean score, and emergency medical students had the lowest ( $p < 0.05$ ) (20).

**8.** A descriptive-analytical study was conducted on 200 senior university students of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences who had been in contact with patients during their undergraduate program to determine their awareness of the Charter of the Patients' Rights. The results showed that the mean  $\pm$  SD of students' awareness was  $14.50 \pm 2.3$  out of 29 (moderate). The highest knowledge score was related to nursing and midwifery students, and the lowest score was related to dental students. There was no statistically significant difference between the awareness score of students from different faculties (21).

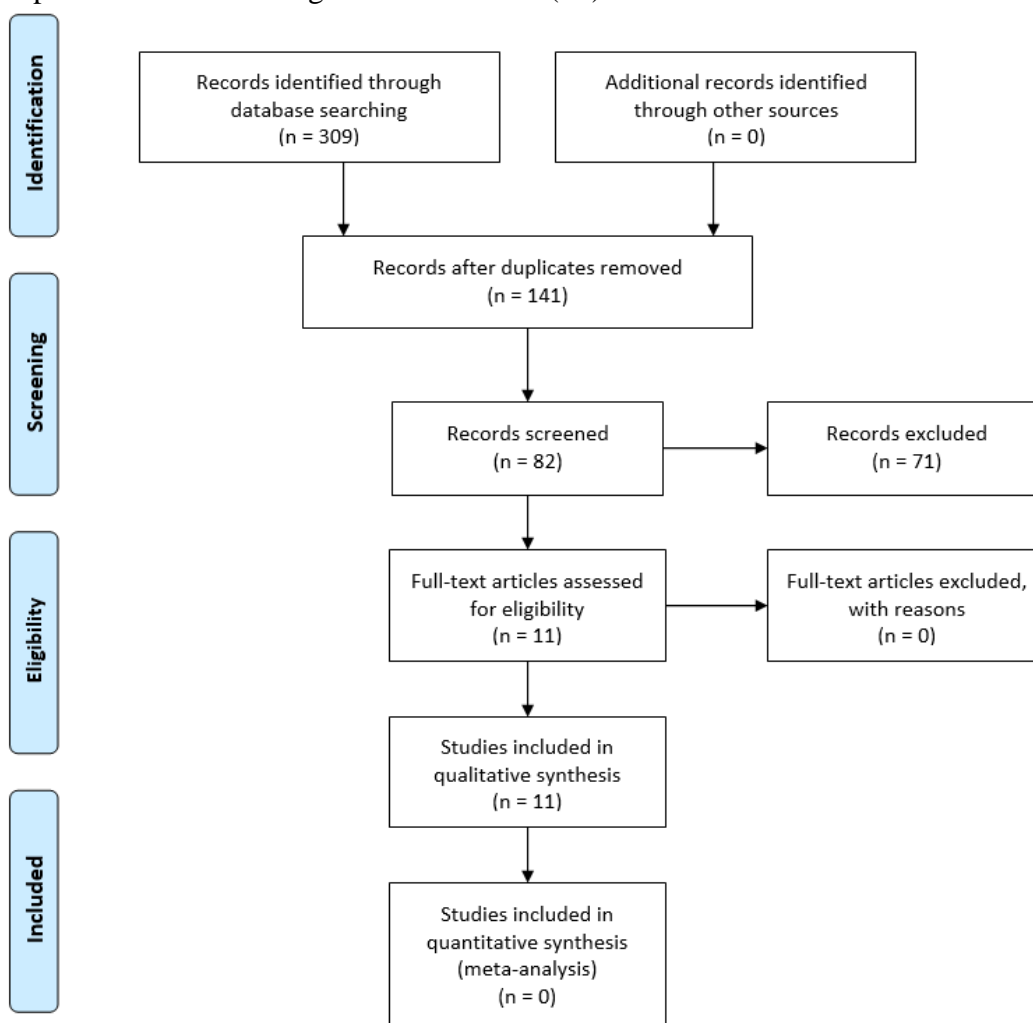
**9.** A cross-sectional, descriptive, and analytical study on 69 paramedical intern students of Lorestan University of Medical Sciences aimed to evaluate the awareness of paramedical intern students about the Patients' Rights Charter. The results showed that in 81.16% of cases, the total

awareness of students was moderate. There was a significant relationship between gender and the students' awareness ( $p=0.001$ ); so the average knowledge scores of female students were higher (22).

**10.** A cross-sectional, descriptive, and analytical study on all students ( $n=143$ ) of Hamadan school of rehabilitation in 2020 aimed to evaluate the awareness of students about the Patients' Rights Charter. The results showed that 49% of study participants had a low level of knowledge, 44.8% had a medium level of knowledge, and 6.3% had a good level of knowledge. That is, approximately half of the students had low levels of awareness about patients' rights. There was no significant relationship between students' gender and

level of knowledge ( $p= 0.162$ ), and between students' field of study and level of knowledge ( $p= 0.937$ ) (23).

**11.** A quasi-experimental study on 61 operating room students of Bushehr University of Medical Sciences aimed to investigate the effect of training workshops on patients' rights on the knowledge of students. The results showed that the mean and standard deviation of pre-test and post-test scores of patient rights awareness were  $22.28\pm 2.63$  and  $23.69\pm 2.63$ , respectively (moderate score). It was found that most operating room students had a good level of knowledge before the intervention, while the level of awareness increased after the intervention (24).



**Fig.1:** PRISMA Flowchart.

#### 4- DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the knowledge of Iranian medical students about patients' rights and its affecting factors on it. Results showed that the knowledge of patients' rights among medical students was moderate. There was a statistically significant relationship between students' knowledge of the Charter of Patients' Rights and the variables of age, gender, degree, and field of study.

Most countries have developed laws to regulate the performance of health care providers regarding the observance of patients' rights. The purpose of the Charter of Patients' Rights is to defend the rights of patients and ensure their adequate care (25). Observance of patients' rights is essential in providing humane and ethical care, and health care workers, without knowledge of ethical concepts, cannot provide appropriate health care for patients (26). Observance of patients' rights leads to maintaining, promoting, and strengthening the relationship between providers and patients, reforming the concept of patient care, accelerating recovery, reducing the length of hospital stay, and increasing the quality of patient services (26, 27).

Neglect of patients' rights creates results in distrust in the medical staff, patients' dissatisfaction, objections to legal authorities, endangering the patients' life, increasing financial and non-financial costs, increasing stress in medical settings, and adverse social effects (27-29). The study by Mosadegh Rad et al. showed that patients were not aware of their rights, and although the physicians' awareness of patients' rights was good, these rights were poorly observed in hospitals (3). The study of Ghaffari showed that despite the increase in facilities and medical services, patients' satisfaction with medical services and nursing has not increased as expected (30). This could be due to nurses' lack of

awareness of patients' rights or their insufficient adherence to them. The study of Azodi et al. also showed that patients are not aware of their rights in the hospital, and nurses do not observe their rights (25). A study by Bathaei et al. showed that students' awareness of most areas of the Charter of Patients' Rights is insufficient and can eventually lead to non-compliance with patients' rights and their consequent dissatisfaction (31). This problem is rooted in students' education (32). It appears that professors and educational planners do not put enough emphasis on the issue of patients' rights. Patients' rights education is not included in the curriculum of medical students, and professors do not feel the need to teach and emphasize the observance of patient rights. The results of the present study showed that medical students are more aware of the Charter of Patients' Rights, which can be due to education, experience, and longer direct contact with patients (33).

All managers and staff in health care agree that the awareness of the Charter of Patients' Rights helps comply with it. However, various studies show that the awareness of patients' rights and compliance with it are insufficient in Iran (34-37). It is necessary to increase students' awareness of patients' rights and provide the necessary training due to their significant role in patient care. Students must be committed to confidentiality and secrecy during treatment or participation in the educational process (31). The present study suggests increasing students' awareness of patients' rights by installing a guide to the Patients' Rights Charter in medical wards, empowering the executive and management system, and supervising the students' performance during medical interventions. Presence in the medical environment and emphasis on patients' rights in educational courses should be on the agenda (17, 27). Professional and medical ethics training courses are

necessary to familiarize students with professional commitments. In addition, medical staff, including physicians and nurses, should be committed to respecting the patients' rights as a role model to the students. This is of great importance for the staff of teaching hospitals.

## 5- CONCLUSION

Although all managers and staff in the field of health agree in health care agree that the awareness of the Charter of Patients' Rights helps comply with it, various studies have shown that the awareness of the patients' rights and the level of its observance among medical students is poor. The mean score of students' knowledge about patients' rights was  $14.95 \pm 2.09$  out of 18 (moderate score). There was a statistically significant relationship between students' knowledge of the Charter of Patients' Rights and the variables of age, gender, degree, and field of study. Therefore, educational planning is required for all medical students, especially dental, emergency, and male students. Professional and medical ethics training courses seem essential in increasing the awareness of students with professional commitments.

## 6- AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study conception or design: RV, and MN; Data analyzing and draft manuscript preparation: AB, and AA; Critical revision of the paper: RV, and AB; Supervision of the research: RV and MN; Final approval of the version to be published: RV, AB, AA, and MN.

**7- CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** None.

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