



ASSOCIATION BETWEEN HEALTHCARE ETHICS AND NABH STANDARDS

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Abstract

Healthcare ethics encompass the moral principles and guidelines that govern the conduct of healthcare providers and organizations. These principles are crucial for ensuring that patient care is delivered with respect, fairness, and compassion, while safeguarding patient rights and promoting trust in the healthcare system. This research paper explores the integral role of healthcare ethics within the accreditation framework of the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) and its profound impact on the Indian healthcare system. By embedding ethical principles such as respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice into its comprehensive standards, NABH ensures the delivery of safe, high-quality, and patient-centric care. The paper examines NABH's commitment to ethics through its specialized accreditation program for Clinical Trial Ethics Committees and its general standards covering informed consent, patient rights, and ethical decision-making. It underscores the importance of healthcare ethics in enhancing patient safety and fostering continuous quality improvement. The rigorous assessment and compliance processes mandated by NABH reinforce the ethical duty of healthcare providers to strive for excellence and equity in patient care. This study highlights NABH's pivotal role in promoting a culture of ethical decision-making, thereby significantly contributing to the advancement of ethically sound healthcare delivery in India.

Keywords: healthcare ethics, NABH, accreditation, patient safety, quality improvement, informed consent, patient rights, ethical decision-making, clinical trial ethics, Indian healthcare system.

INTRODUCTION

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) has firmly embedded ethical principles at the core of its accreditation framework. By establishing comprehensive standards that govern the delivery of safe, high-quality, and patient-centric healthcare, NABH plays a pivotal role in promoting ethical practices across the Indian healthcare system.

NABH's accreditation program for healthcare organizations is designed to ensure compliance with stringent ethical guidelines. The standards address key areas such as ethics committee composition and procedures, investigator roles and qualifications, and clinical trial site policies including informed consent processes, adverse event reporting, and investigational product management. Organizations seeking NABH accreditation must demonstrate a strong commitment to upholding ethical principles in their daily operations and decision-making.

The integration of ethics into NABH's accreditation criteria reflects the organization's recognition that ethical conduct is essential for providing safe, effective, and compassionate healthcare. By setting these standards, NABH aims to foster a healthcare ecosystem in India that prioritizes patient welfare, promotes transparency, and adheres to the highest ethical standards. This comprehensive approach to accreditation has positioned NABH as a key driver of ethical practices in the Indian healthcare landscape.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research paper relies on secondary research methods to explore the association between healthcare ethics and NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers) standards. Secondary research involves the systematic collection, synthesis, and analysis of existing literature, scholarly articles, reports, and relevant documents pertaining to the topic. Through comprehensive literature review, key themes on healthcare ethics in relation to NABH standards have been identified and synthesized.

HEALTHCARE ETHICS AND IT'S CORE PRINCIPLES

Healthcare ethics refers to the principles and moral standards that govern actions and decision-making in healthcare environments. It deals with the challenging ethical issues and questions that emerge in medical practice, care provision, and the development of public health policies.

The foundation of healthcare ethics is built upon four core principles:

1. **Autonomy:** Respecting a patient's right to make informed decisions about their own health and treatment. This includes providing patients with comprehensive information about their diagnosis, treatment options, risks, and benefits to enable them to exercise their autonomy effectively.
2. **Beneficence:** Acting in the best interest of the patient to promote good health outcomes and enhance patient well-being. Healthcare professionals have an ethical obligation to provide care that benefits the patient and minimizes harm.
3. **Non-maleficence:** Avoiding actions that could cause harm to patients. This principle requires healthcare professionals to carefully assess the risks and benefits of any intervention and ensure that the benefits outweigh the potential harms.
4. **Justice:** Ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all patients, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, or other factors. This principle also addresses the allocation of scarce healthcare resources.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN HEALTHCARE

Healthcare professionals encounter numerous ethical challenges in their daily work. Some of the most common issues include:

1. **Informed consent:** Ensuring that patients fully understand the risks, benefits, and alternatives of a treatment or procedure before giving their permission.
2. **Confidentiality:** Protecting patient information from unauthorized access or disclosure, fostering trust in the patient-provider relationship.
3. **End-of-life decisions:** Navigating complex issues such as euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, and withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment.
4. **Allocation of scarce resources:** Determining how to fairly distribute limited healthcare resources, such as organs for transplantation or ventilators during a pandemic.
5. **Conflicts of interest:** Addressing situations where a healthcare professional's personal interests (e.g., financial, professional, or personal) may influence their clinical decision-making.

NABH'S COMMITMENT TO ETHICS

NABH's commitment to ethics is deeply ingrained in its mission and accreditation standards. The organization's primary objective is to enhance the Indian healthcare system by promoting continuous quality improvement and ensuring patient safety. This commitment to quality and

safety directly aligns with the core ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, which require healthcare providers to act in the best interests of patients and avoid causing harm.

NABH's accreditation standards cover a wide range of areas, including ethics committee composition and procedures, investigator roles and qualifications, and clinical trial site policies. These standards ensure that healthcare organizations adhere to rigorous ethical guidelines in their operations and decision-making processes. By setting these standards, NABH aims to foster a healthcare ecosystem in India that prioritizes patient welfare and promotes transparency.

The integration of ethics into NABH's accreditation criteria reflects the organization's recognition that ethical conduct is essential for providing safe, effective, and compassionate healthcare. NABH's commitment to ethics is further demonstrated through its collaboration with stakeholders, including the government, industry, and consumers, to develop and implement accreditation programs. This collaborative approach ensures that the interests of all parties involved in healthcare delivery are considered and that ethical principles are upheld.

Moreover, NABH's global recognition and accreditation by the International Society for Quality in Healthcare (ISQua) under its International Accreditation Program (IAP) further reinforces its commitment to ethics. ISQua's accreditation authenticates that NABH standards are in consonance with global benchmarks and ethical guidelines set by the organization. This international recognition positions NABH as a key player in promoting ethical practices in the Indian healthcare landscape and beyond.

NABH's commitment to ethics extends beyond its accreditation programs. The organization also engages in educational and training initiatives aimed at fostering a culture of quality and patient safety. These initiatives, which include public lectures, workshops, and seminars, help healthcare professionals understand the importance of ethical conduct and its impact on patient outcomes. By investing in education and training, NABH ensures that ethical principles are not only embedded in the accreditation standards but also internalized by healthcare providers.

Furthermore, NABH's warning against document forgery by hospitals demonstrates its unwavering commitment to upholding the highest standards of quality and integrity in healthcare delivery. The organization recognizes that ethical conduct is not limited to patient

care but also extends to administrative and operational aspects of healthcare organizations. By taking a strong stance against unethical practices, NABH sends a clear message that it will not compromise on its ethical principles.

In conclusion, NABH's commitment to ethics is a cornerstone of its mission and accreditation framework. By setting comprehensive standards, collaborating with stakeholders, and engaging in educational initiatives, NABH ensures that ethical principles are at the heart of healthcare delivery in India. NABH's global recognition and its stance against unethical practices further solidify its position as a champion of ethical healthcare.

ETHICS COMMITTEE ACCREDITATION

NABH's Ethics Committee Accreditation Program is a critical component of its commitment to promoting ethical practices in the Indian healthcare system. This dedicated accreditation program ensures that the committees responsible for overseeing clinical research adhere to robust ethical principles and processes, thereby safeguarding the rights and well-being of research participants.

The Ethics Committee Accreditation Program is designed to assess and validate the competence and effectiveness of ethics committees in reviewing and monitoring clinical trials. NABH's accreditation standards for ethics committees cover a wide range of areas, including the committee's composition, operational procedures, review processes, and record-keeping practices.

To be accredited by NABH, ethics committees must demonstrate their adherence to ethical guidelines and their ability to make informed decisions that prioritize the safety and rights of research participants. This includes ensuring that the committee members possess the necessary expertise and qualifications, that informed consent procedures are followed, and that adverse events are promptly reported and addressed.

The accreditation process involves a comprehensive evaluation of the ethics committee's policies, procedures, and documentation. NABH assessors conduct on-site visits to verify the committee's compliance with the accreditation standards and to assess the effectiveness of its decision-making processes.

By obtaining NABH accreditation, ethics committees demonstrate their commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards in clinical research. This accreditation serves as a mark of quality and credibility, assuring research participants, sponsors, and regulatory

authorities that the ethics committee is capable of providing robust oversight and protection for clinical trials.

NABH's Ethics Committee Accreditation Program is a crucial component of its broader efforts to promote ethical practices in the Indian healthcare sector. By setting rigorous standards and validating the competence of ethics committees, NABH plays a pivotal role in fostering a research environment that prioritizes the well-being of participants and upholds the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice.

The integration of this specialized accreditation program within NABH's framework underscores the organization's unwavering commitment to ethical healthcare delivery. By ensuring that ethics committees adhere to robust ethical principles, NABH contributes to the development of a healthcare ecosystem in India that is built on a foundation of ethical conduct and patient-centric care.

NABH'S ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) sets comprehensive standards to ensure the delivery of high-quality and patient-centric healthcare. These standards are deeply rooted in ethical principles, ensuring that healthcare providers adhere to robust ethical guidelines. The following table outlines the key ethical principles and their alignment with NABH standards:

Chapter	Standard	Healthcare Ethics Aspect	Objective Elements	Core Principles of Healthcare Ethics
Chapter 1	AAC.1	Access Assessment and Continuity of Care	Patients are informed of the services provided by the organization.	Respect for Autonomy
	AAC.2	Access Assessment and Continuity of Care	Only those patients who can be cared for by the organization are admitted.	Justice
Chapter 2	COP.1	Care of Patients	Patients undergo an established initial assessment and periodic reassessments.	Beneficence
	COP.2	Care of Patients	Patients receive life-stabilizing treatment and are then either admitted or transferred appropriately.	Beneficence
Chapter 3	MOM.1	Management of Medication	Pharmacy services and usage of medication is done safely.	Non-maleficence
	MOM.2	Management of	The organisation develops,	Justice

		Medication	updates and implements a hospital formulary.	
	MOM.3	Management of Medication	Medications are stored appropriately and are available where required.	Non-maleficence
	MOM.4	Management of Medication	Medications are prescribed safely and rationally.	Beneficence
	MOM.5	Management of Medication	Medication orders are written in a uniform manner.	Non-maleficence
	MOM.6	Management of Medication	Medications are dispensed in a safe manner.	Non-maleficence
	MOM.7	Management of Medication	Medications are administered safely.	Non-maleficence
	MOM.8	Management of Medication	Patients are monitored after medication administration.	Beneficence
	MOM.9	Management of Medication	Narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, chemotherapeutic agents and radioactive agents are used safely.	Non-maleficence
	MOM.10	Management of Medication	Implantable prosthesis and medical devices are used in accordance with laid down criteria.	Justice
	MOM.11	Management of Medication	Medical supplies and consumables are stored appropriately and are available where required.	Non-maleficence
Chapter 4	PRE.1	Patient Rights and Education	The organisation protects and promotes patient and family rights and informs them about their responsibilities during care.	Respect for Autonomy
	PRE.2	Patient Rights and Education	Patient and family rights support individual beliefs, values and involve the patient and family in decision-making processes.	Respect for Autonomy
	PRE.3	Patient Rights and Education	The patient and/or family members are educated to make informed decisions and are involved in the care planning and delivery process.	Respect for Autonomy
	PRE.4	Patient Rights and Education	Informed consent is obtained from the patient or family about their care.	Respect for Autonomy
	PRE.5	Patient Rights and Education	Patient and families have a right to information and education about their healthcare needs.	Beneficence
	PRE.6	Patient Rights and Education	Patients and families have a right to information on	Justice

			expected costs.	
	PRE.7	Patient Rights and Education	The organisation has a mechanism to capture patient's feedback and to redress complaints.	Justice
	PRE.8	Patient Rights and Education	The organisation has a system for effective communication with patients and/or families.	Beneficence
Chapter 5	HIC.1	Hospital Infection Control	The organisation has a system for infection control and prevention.	Non-maleficence
	HIC.2	Hospital Infection Control	The organisation has a mechanism for reporting and investigating infections.	Justice
Chapter 6	PSQ.1	Patient Safety and Quality Improvement	The organisation has a system for continuous quality improvement.	Beneficence
	PSQ.2	Patient Safety and Quality Improvement	The organisation ensures patient safety through risk management and mitigation.	Non-maleficence
Chapter 7	ROM.1	Responsibilities of Management	The organisation has a system for managing responsibilities and delegating tasks.	Justice
	ROM.2	Responsibilities of Management	The organisation ensures accountability and transparency in decision-making.	Respect for Autonomy
Chapter 9	HRM.9	Human Resource Management	The organisation promotes staff well-being and addresses health and safety needs.	Non-maleficence
	HRM.10	Human Resource Management	The organisation maintains personal files with confidentiality ensured.	Non-maleficence
	HRM.11	Human Resource Management	The organisation has a process for credentialing and privileging of medical professionals.	Justice
Chapter 10	IMS.1	Information Management System	The organisation has a system for managing patient information.	Respect for Autonomy
	IMS.2	Information Management System	The organisation ensures confidentiality and security of patient information.	Non-maleficence

EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

Beyond accreditation, NABH engages in educational initiatives aimed at instilling a culture of quality and patient safety among healthcare professionals. Workshops, seminars, and public lectures are organized to emphasize the importance of ethical conduct in improving

patient outcomes. By investing in education, NABH ensures that ethical principles are not only embedded in accreditation standards but also internalized by those delivering care.

CONCLUSION

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) has firmly embedded healthcare ethics at the core of its accreditation framework, solidifying its position as a champion of ethical practices in the Indian healthcare system. By establishing comprehensive standards that govern the delivery of safe, high-quality, and patient-centric care, NABH has ensured that ethical principles are not merely aspirational, but deeply ingrained in the daily operations and decision-making processes of healthcare organizations.

At the heart of NABH's mission is the unwavering commitment to improving healthcare quality and patient safety. This objective inherently aligns with the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, which require healthcare providers to act in the best interests of patients and avoid causing harm. By setting stringent standards across a wide range of areas, including informed consent, patient rights, and ethical decision-making frameworks, NABH has created a framework that empowers healthcare organizations to uphold the fundamental ethical tenets of respect for autonomy, justice, and the preservation of human dignity.

The integration of ethics into NABH's accreditation criteria reflects the organization's recognition that ethical conduct is essential for providing compassionate and effective healthcare. This holistic approach to accreditation has positioned NABH as a key driver of ethical practices, fostering a healthcare ecosystem in India that prioritizes patient welfare, promotes transparency, and adheres to the highest global standards.

NABH's commitment to ethics extends beyond its accreditation programs. The organization's educational and training initiatives, aimed at fostering a culture of quality and patient safety, further reinforce the importance of ethical conduct among healthcare professionals. By investing in the development of ethical competencies, NABH ensures that ethical principles are not only embedded in the accreditation standards but also internalized by the individuals responsible for delivering healthcare services.

Moreover, NABH's global recognition and accreditation by the International Society for Quality in Healthcare (ISQua) under its International Accreditation Program (IAP) further solidifies the organization's standing as a champion of ethical healthcare. This international validation authenticates that NABH standards are in consonance with global benchmarks and

ethical guidelines, positioning the organization as a respected authority in the realm of healthcare ethics.

The NABH Ethics Committee Accreditation Program is a testament to the organization's unwavering dedication to ethical research practices. By setting rigorous standards for ethics committees overseeing clinical trials, NABH ensures that the rights and well-being of research participants are safeguarded, and that the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice are upheld throughout the research process.

The association between NABH standards and healthcare ethics is not merely a theoretical construct, but a tangible reality that is transforming the Indian healthcare landscape. Through its accreditation programs, NABH has empowered healthcare organizations to prioritize ethical conduct, fostering a culture of accountability, transparency, and patient-centric care.

As the Indian healthcare system continues to evolve, the role of NABH in promoting ethical practices will only become more crucial. By setting the benchmark for ethical excellence and driving continuous improvement, NABH is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping a healthcare ecosystem that is built on a foundation of ethical principles, ultimately benefiting patients, healthcare providers, and the broader community.

In conclusion, NABH's unwavering commitment to healthcare ethics is a testament to the organization's vision and leadership. By integrating ethical principles into its accreditation framework, NABH has established itself as a trailblazer in the realm of ethical healthcare, setting the standard for healthcare organizations across India and beyond. As the Indian healthcare system continues to evolve, the enduring influence of NABH's ethical standards will undoubtedly continue to shape the delivery of safe, high-quality, and patient-centric care, ultimately contributing to the well-being of individuals and the betterment of society as a whole.

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