BIO-ETHICS IN PAKISTAN

The Birth, Growth and development of BIGS

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In Shifa College of Medicine, Islamabad bioethics was formally introduced into the undergraduate curriculum from year 2008. Two faculty members received a postgraduate diploma in biomedical ethics from the University of Karachi and were responsible for initiating this curriculum both in the preclinical as well as clinical years. It was then felt that there is a need to educate more faculty members for implementing the curriculum rather than relying solely on the expertise of a few select individuals.

Towards the end of 2008 a series of workshops were organized for the faculty. One of the workshops was on Ethics & Professionalism. After the workshop, all those who wanted to enhance their knowledge of ethics were asked if they would like to become part of a Bioethics Group. Those who were interested gave in their names and e-mail addresses. A total of 74 faculty members from Shifa College of Medicine, Shifa International Hospital and Shifa College of Nursing out of 122 were willing to join. This lead to the beginning of Bioethics Group of Shifa (BIGS).

First meeting of BIGS: First meeting of this group was held in March 2009. Fifteen people were selected from the pool and invited. For the meeting, a short movie called "Rice Plate" was shown and group was asked to reflect on it. Discussion part covered prejudices whether religious or otherwise and how they affect people. The school syllabi of Islamiat and cultural, moral and religious values were debated.

Second meeting of BIGS: This time the group was shown a few advertisements about doctors advertising for health insurance companies and manufacturers of nutrition supplements. Conflicts of interest and the physician - pharmaceutical company relationship were discussed.

Third meeting of BIGS: For this meeting a clip from the Indian movie, Yeh hai Jalwa was selected. In this clip, a grandfather asks his grandchildren to donate a kidney for their father. The children refuse giving various reasons. Using this was a stimulus discussion on rights of parents and children and organ donation took place.

In the three meetings through discussions and debate the group became acquainted with various ethical issues. They were able to identify ethical dilemmas and also brought forward their own related experiences during the sessions. Thus a more active learning was made. It is hoped that in the coming months this group will grow stronger.