

BIOETHICS IN UZBEKISTAN: LAWS AND PRACTICE OF MEDICAL UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the legal framework and the practice of applying the principles of bioethics in the Republic of Uzbekistan in the context of the activities of medical universities. It examines the main legal acts, the structure of the national system of ethical supervision, the role and functions of ethical committees, the practice of teaching bioethics in medical educational institutions, and identifies gaps and provides recommendations for their elimination. The analysis is based on a systematic review of literature, official documents, and publications on the organization of ethical review in Uzbekistan and international standards. The results show that a basic regulatory framework (legislation and regulations) has been established in the country in recent years, but there are still organizational and personnel issues in the work of ethical committees and in the teaching of bioethics at medical schools.

Keywords: Bioethics, ethical committee, medical university, legal regulation, Uzbekistan, informed consent, clinical research.

INTRODUCTION

Bioethics as an interdisciplinary field emerged in the middle of the 20th century and has become an integral part of medical practice, scientific research, and higher medical education in recent decades. In the context of modernizing healthcare and expanding clinical research, several countries are developing national systems of ethical review and rules for protecting the rights of research subjects. For Uzbekistan, which has undergone significant transformations in healthcare and scientific policy, the question of whether the existing legislation and practices ensure compliance with bioethical principles in medical universities and clinical research is becoming increasingly relevant.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the form of a qualitative analysis of documents and literature. The main steps included:

1. Searching and selecting legal acts, publications, and official documents.
2. Systematizing information about the structure of national ethical bodies and regulations.
3. Comparative analysis with international standards.
4. Critical evaluation of the teaching of bioethics in medical universities.

Legal framework and institutional structure:

The legal framework is based on the Law on the Protection of Citizens' Health and related acts. There is a national system of ethical review, but local university committees often face staffing and methodological problems.

Teaching bioethics in medical schools:

Medical schools have courses on bioethics in their curricula. These courses reflect international principles, but they are often limited to theory and do not adequately develop practical skills.

The practice of ethical committees in medical universities:

Ethical commissions must review research protocols, assess the risk or benefit, and ensure that informed consent is obtained. Challenges: centralization, lack of personnel, and a lack of transparency in procedures and uniform standards.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of bioethics in modern Uzbekistan is impossible without analyzing the national legislation and its application in medical universities and healthcare institutions. The development of the legal framework in this area reflects the state's commitment to creating a system for protecting patients' rights, ensuring the quality of medical services, and harmonizing regulations with international standards.

One of the key acts is the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Protection of Citizens' Health," which enshrines the right of every individual to receive medical care, protection of health, and equal access to medical services. This law serves as the foundation for all medical practices, including bioethical issues, and provides a framework for regulating patient rights, the responsibilities of medical professionals, and the ethical principles of medical care. However, there are still challenges in ensuring equal access to quality medical services, particularly in rural areas, which highlights the need for improved enforcement mechanisms. The Law on the Reproductive Health of Citizens is also receiving significant attention. It regulates issues related to the use of assisted reproductive technologies, the right of spouses to reproductive health, and the responsibilities of medical institutions in this area. This law is important from a bioethical perspective, as it addresses complex issues related to the use of IVF technologies, surrogacy, and reproductive cell donation. These provisions require a cautious approach that takes into account the cultural, religious, and ethical values of Uzbek society.

Of particular importance is the Law on Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues (2022). This law regulates the procedures for organ donation and transplantation, defines the range of donors and recipients, and establishes strict requirements for transplantation procedures. The most important bioethical principle enshrined in the law is the principle of voluntary and informed consent. However, the practice of application shows that public opinion in Uzbekistan is still divided on the issue of transplantation, due to both religious beliefs and a lack of awareness among citizens. This presents a challenge for medical schools, as they must train specialists who are not only technically competent, but also have a deep understanding of the ethical aspects of transplantation.

The Law on Personal Data (2019) is directly related to bioethics, as the protection of confidential patient health information is a fundamental principle of medical practice. In the context of digitalization of healthcare and the introduction of electronic health records, this law becomes particularly important. It sets the rules for processing and storing medical

information, but in practice, medical institutions face challenges in implementing all the requirements due to insufficient technical equipment and weak digital security training.

A significant innovation was the adoption of the Law on Clinical Research (ZRU-879, 2023), as well as the Regulations on the Procedure for Conducting Clinical Research. These documents establish the rights and obligations of researchers and participants in clinical research, as well as define the mechanism for the work of ethical committees. The law requires informed consent from research participants and provides for the special protection of minors and other vulnerable groups. This brings Uzbekistan's legislation closer to international standards, including the Helsinki Declaration and the GCP guidelines. Nevertheless, there is still a problem with a formal approach to the consent procedure, where the signature is placed without a full understanding of the essence of the study.

In addition to laws, decrees issued by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and orders issued by the Ministry of Health play an important role in regulating the state registration of medicines, the procedure for conducting biomedical experiments, and the introduction of new technologies.

These acts complement the legislative framework and ensure control over the safety and effectiveness of medical activities.

In general, it can be noted that in recent years, Uzbekistan has established a basic legal system in the field of bioethics that is in line with international standards. However, the main challenge lies not so much in the existence of laws, but in their practical implementation. The lack of unified guidelines, insufficient training for specialists, limited resources for ethical committees, and a low level of legal culture among the population result in many provisions remaining declarative. To address these issues, it is necessary to strengthen the educational component in medical universities, integrate bioethics into curricula, develop ethical control institutions, and expand international cooperation in this area.

Thus, an analysis of the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan shows that the country is moving towards harmonizing its national norms with global ethical standards. However, the practical implementation of these laws requires a systematic approach that includes training medical personnel, raising legal awareness among the population, and developing a culture of respect for human rights in the medical field.

The discussion of bioethics in Uzbekistan requires a deep analysis of not only legal norms, but also the sociocultural context and medical education practices. As the country's healthcare system is being modernized, medical universities and research institutions are facing the challenge of complying with international ethical standards.

Firstly, it should be noted that a key challenge is the discrepancy between the formal legal framework and its practical implementation. Laws on the protection of citizens' health and clinical research contain provisions regulating the rights of patients and volunteers, but in practice, many protection mechanisms remain underdeveloped. For example, the process of obtaining informed consent is often limited to a formal signature, without ensuring that the patient truly understands the nature of the intervention and the potential risks.

Secondly, the teaching of bioethics in medical schools is developing, but it still retains an academic and theoretical nature. Students learn about the history of bioethics and international documents (the Nuremberg Code, the Helsinki Declaration, and the Belmont

Report), but practical cases that simulate real-life situations are rarely included in the curriculum. There is no unified standard for teaching, which reduces the level of training for future doctors.

The third important aspect is the functioning of ethics committees. A number of medical universities have established local ethics committees, but their activities face challenges related to a lack of independence, human resources, and unified procedures. Unlike in many European and North American countries, where committees have a well-established system of accreditation and collaboration, this process in Uzbekistan is fragmented.

The fourth area for discussion is related to the role of international organizations. UNESCO and WHO programs in the field of bioethics provide an opportunity for countries in the region to share experiences and improve the skills of their specialists. It is important for Uzbekistan to expand its participation in these initiatives, create networked educational programs, and invite foreign experts for joint training and research.

The fifth area concerns cultural and religious factors. In Uzbekistan, where Islamic values play an important role, it is necessary to consider the balance between traditional medical practices and modern ethical standards. For example, issues related to reproductive technologies, organ transplantation, or euthanasia require a sensitive approach that takes into account national identity and religious ethics.

The sixth factor is the digitalization of medicine. With the introduction of electronic medical records, telemedicine, and artificial intelligence in clinical practice, new ethical challenges arise: protecting personal data, ensuring equal access to digital technologies, and preventing discrimination and algorithm bias. It is important for medical schools to include these topics in their bioethics courses to prepare future professionals for these new challenges.

Consequently, the discussion on bioethics in Uzbekistan shows that the country is moving towards creating a comprehensive ethical infrastructure, but there are still many challenges to be addressed. These include increasing the independence of ethical committees, developing national educational standards for bioethics, strengthening international cooperation, and integrating digital ethics into medical training. Addressing these issues will enable Uzbekistan to harmoniously combine its national traditions with global bioethical standards.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion on bioethics in Uzbekistan requires special attention, as it reflects not only the current state, but also the prospects for the development of the healthcare system and medical education.

First of all, it should be noted that in recent years, Uzbekistan has adopted legislative acts that regulate the main aspects of bioethics, including the protection of patients' rights and the regulation of clinical research. However, the practice of their implementation reveals certain gaps. There is a need to strengthen control mechanisms, develop transparent procedures for ethical committees, and expand opportunities for patient participation in decision-making processes.

Secondly, the teaching of bioethics in medical universities should be not only theoretical, but also practical. It is necessary to include simulation training, clinical cases, and

interdisciplinary projects in the curriculum. This will allow future doctors to develop decision-making skills in complex situations and strengthen public trust in medicine.

Thirdly, international cooperation is of particular importance. Uzbekistan needs to actively participate in international bioethics networks, implement best practices, and borrow from countries with a well-developed ethical review system. This will ensure the country's integration into the global medical community.

Fourth, training and professional development of bioethics specialists is an important area. The creation of master's and doctoral programs, as well as advanced training courses for members of ethical committees, will serve as a foundation for the sustainable development of the national bioethics system.

Finally, the conclusion should emphasize the need to take into account the cultural and religious characteristics of Uzbekistan when developing ethical standards. By combining national traditions with universal principles of bioethics, we can create a harmonious model that focuses on protecting individual rights and promoting medical development.

Thus, the prospects for the development of bioethics in Uzbekistan are associated with strengthening the legal framework, expanding teaching practices, international cooperation, and the integration of digital technologies. By implementing these steps comprehensively, the country will be able to build a modern system that meets global standards and takes into account national specifics.

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