Ethical Considerations in Data Collection Procedures in Health Professional Educational Researches

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Medical education is the foundation upon which the future healthcare system is built. Ensuring its quality and effectiveness is paramount to producing competent and ethical healthcare professionals. However, the evaluation of medical education programs is a complex and multifaceted process that raises significant ethical concerns. Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) and World Federation of Medical Education (WFME) mandate all medical and dental colleges in Pakistan to have quality assurance department for program evaluation and improvement. Institutional Review Board (IRB), present in medical colleges are usually designated for ethical consideration of research proposals and data collection procedure of research. However data collected during program evaluation has no standard operating procedure. There should be a separate Educational ethics Review Board to review program evaluation data collection procedure, teaching courses content and assessment process. There are many factors which need to be reviewed. Ethical evaluation of medical education necessitates transparency and accountability[1]. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the attitudes and practices of quality assurance teams in a medical organization when it comes to considering ethical measures during the data collection process for program evaluation. Ensuring ethical data collection is crucial for maintaining the integrity of evaluations and upholding ethical standards in research and program assessment. The aim of article is to emphasize the importance of implementing ethical considerations by quality assurance team in their work. Stakeholders, including students, faculty, institutions, and the public, have a right to know how medical education programs are evaluated and how their data is used. Transparency in evaluation methods and outcomes builds trust and ensures accountability for program improvement. Ethical considerations in program evaluation data collection in health professional education are crucial to protect the rights and well-being of all stakeholders involved. It should be mandatory to obtain informed consent from all participants, including students,

faculty, and other stakeholders, before collecting any data. Explain the purpose of the evaluation, what data will be collected, how it will be used, and any potential risks and benefits. Ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of participants are protected. Anonymize data whenever possible to prevent the identification of individuals. Use secure data storage and transmission methods to safeguard sensitive information. Participation in the evaluation should be voluntary, and participants should be able to withdraw at any time without consequences. Avoid coercion or undue pressure to participate. Implement strict data security measures to prevent unauthorized access or breaches. This includes encryption, access controls, and regular data audits to maintain data integrity[2]. Assess the potential risks of data collection, both physical and psychological, and take steps to minimize or mitigate these risks. Ensure that the evaluation process does not harm participants or the educational program. Respect the autonomy and rights of participants to make informed decisions regarding their involvement in the evaluation. Avoid any form of manipulation or deception. Strive to maximize the benefits of the evaluation for educational improvement while minimizing any potential harm. Share results with all relevant stakeholders in a clear and understandable manner. Medical education evaluations must be designed and implemented in a manner that eliminates bias and discrimination. This includes considerations for diverse student populations and ensuring that evaluation criteria do not disadvantage any group. Maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of students and faculty during evaluations is paramount. Deductive disclosure or internal confidentiality occurs when the traits of students or faculty member or groups make them recognizable in program evaluation reports. Internal confidentiality is when a participant in an interview may recognize what other participant's views on a specific agenda, it is distinct from external confidentiality in which data protection is assured from external participants not involved in program evaluation data collection. Evaluation process should consider a conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the specific program process and protecting the identities of the students and faculty who participated in that program. Vulnerable populations such as students or junior faculty members in the workplace might face negative consequences if their identities are revealed. Dominant approach to confidentiality

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can be used during program evaluation that argues use of pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, it assumes that students and faculty details in the data can be changed to protect our respondents without compromising the meaning of the data. Alternative approach can also be used especially if evaluation process is using qualitative data collection tools as interviews. Post data collection confidentiality form should be formulated. Aim of the form is to ask students and faculty feedback data representation and handling. You may ask participants whether they want to share the information just as they provided, with no personal details needing to be changed or if they want some changes to be made such as their name or any other information. Participant should be given options in written that the information can be shared just as provided. They should also be given an option to remove data segments that reflect their identity if they are not comfortable. Institutions must use evaluation results not for punitive measures but as a basis for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of medical education. Assessors should be impartial and free from undue influence, ensuring that the evaluation process remains unbiased. Continuously monitor the ethical aspects of the evaluation throughout the data collection process[3,4]. Be prepared to address any ethical concerns that may arise promptly. Develop a plan for the responsible disposal of data once the evaluation is complete, in accordance with ethical and legal requirements[5,6]. By uncovering attitudes, practices, challenges, and strategies, the research can inform the development of guidelines and best practices for ethical data collection in program evaluation efforts[7,8]. To address these ethical challenges, institutions should prioritize ongoing professional development for faculty members involved in program evaluation. Workshops, training sessions, and resources on research ethics and best practices in data collection can empower faculty to navigate these ethical considerations confidently. Collaboration with research ethics committees and experienced evaluators can also provide guidance and oversight[9,10]. By considering these ethical principles throughout the program evaluation data collection process in health professional education, you can help ensure that the evaluation is conducted with integrity, fairness, and the well-being of all participants in mind.

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