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| **11th Punjab Bioethics group meeting**  Shalamar Medical & Dental College, Lahore  Friday, Oct 7th 2022 |

# **Call to order**

The 11thmeeting of **Punjab Bioethics Group** was held virtually at **Shalamar Medical & Dental College, Lahore** on Friday, Oct 7th 2022. The meeting was moderated by Dr. Saadia Shahzad and lasted for two hours; & was attended by the following professionals from various institutes of Punjab.

**Attendees included:**

Dr. Sarosh Saleem, Dr. Saadia Shahzad, Prof. Zahid Bashir, Prof. Naeem Zafar, Prof. Dr. Farkhanda Ghafoor, Dr.Nuzhat Malik, Dr. AnumIshtiaq, Dr. FareehaFarooq, AtifWaqar, AfifaEhsan, Nazish Khalid, Dr. Aisha, Asifa Bhutto, Shakeel Sheikh, Faiza Ahmed, Farhat Saleem , Fatima Khalid, Irfan Ahmed, MariumMehtab, NasimTariq NaseemSallahudin, Prem Kumar, NaseemSallahudin, Sabrina, AnumAzhar, ZiarukhJah, Muhammad ShahidSaeed, SaniaMurad, GulAfshan, HadiqaJaleel, LubnaRiaz, Manawan Campus team, SadiaRao, Saira, Maria, Arsha, WajihaAijaz, ShaziaRasul, Sharmeen, Prof. Nazli Hameed, Sabrina

# **Meeting Minutes**

Two cases were discussed and an active discourse was generated between the PBG members.

**Case 1:**

Brain death- Bioethics and Islam presented by Dr. Anum Ishtiaq from AKUH, a Family Physician, Palliative Medicine Fellow at Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, and former graduate of Diploma in Healthcare Ethics & Professionalism (DHEP). Dr. Annum talked about Brain Death, its definition, historical background, and criteria for clinical determination of brain death with reference to Archie Batterbee’s case. She then talked about the clinical and legal criteria of brain death in Pakistan and shared the perspectives of brain death from an Islamic point of view.

How to determine that the brain is disintegrated?

* Identified gaps
* Islamic jurisprudence
* Clerics interpretation

Sarosh Saleem said it is a very profound topic we need to talk about it more often. Prof. Zahid’s question was whether this should be a religious decision of scientific? We are not really following the precedents: It should be a personal decision. Whereas, Aisha suggested that while making policies, Islamic scholars should be involved. Dr. Anum’s opinion was that in such a situation Physicians are right decision makers. Dr. Irfan suggested that in such scenarios it is important that solutions are identified through discussions; together we should find a solution following the scientific guidelines. One other participant Dr. Naseem Salahuddin asked as to what happens to a wider range of people who don’t die in hospitals? There was a question about who the real expert in this situation is, the molvis or clinicians. Dr. Sabrina shared a case and suggested that there should be a legal document that covers all the brain death issues. Dr. Saadia Shahzad added that it’s quite difficult to decide only on clinical grounds. The legal experts joined the discussion which lasted nearly 45 minutes. In the interest of time, it was suggested that as a group we have a responsibility to talk about such challenging matters and to coordinate with legal and religious experts.

**Case 2:**

When we start judging our own acts- All in a day’s work for clinicians; the talk was presented by Dr. Sharmeen from Indus hospital Manawan campus Lahore. She shared a case of 16 years old girl who was pregnant as a result of incest and was brought to the hospital. Dr. Sharmeen questioned as a primary care physician as to what the ethical responsibility of a clinician in this situation as the patient, who is a minor, is being requested mother to have an abortion. Legally, abortion is not allowed in Pakistan but the context of incest and giving birth to a child by a young girl has many social, moral and religious challenges.

Dr. Saadia Shahzad opened the discourse with her comment that the root cause of such incidences should be addressed. Knowledge about ethical behavior, religion, and moral values in society needs to be practiced thoroughly; as such unfortunate incidences actually entail to our degrading values and diversification from the right path that has been ordered for us in the religion. As a legal expert, Ms.

Anum said that legal system and the *Hadood* ordinance should be practiced effectively and with no relaxation for anyone. Dr. Sarosh asked if this was the responsibility of physicians to address the root cause. Dr. Saadia suggested that not the physicians but the *ulema,* universities and society at large must understand and take it as their moral responsibility. Sarosh further added that IVF is another example where our religious scholars are not clear: one cannot legally marry a minor but if she gets pregnant not because of her own will, is supposed to take care of a child she never wanted to have?? Upon this, Anum Azhar’s comment was that IVF has been duly discussed and actually allowed by our *shariat* court — just a legal input.

Dr. Sidra added that rape happens globally if one reads the statistics of legal action in foreign countries, one would be surprised how easily rapist walk away and how porn industry, abortion clinics, female movements have actually haven’t contributed much to the solution. Participants also discussed that many problems arise for the victims in such cases: paternity issue of the fetus, care of the victim girl, status of the victim girl in the society, future life prospects for the victim girl, her mental emotional well being; and many other such problems arise as a result of such unfortunate incident.

Ms. Anum Azhar agreed that as a practicing lawyer she herself isn’t proud of what Pakistan’s law and jurisprudence stand as of now. Dr. Sarosh said,what is legal may not be ethical! Dr. Shazia insisted that Islamic rules should be followed and Dr. Sarosh replied that the application of these laws is not valid unless the whole society provides the structure advised by Islam. There should be a uniform application instead of picking and choosing some laws from Islamic rulings.

Dr. Sabrina appreciated the discussion of both topics in the meeting and insisted on the role of healthcare institutions to look into the legal matters related to healthcare. Legal system must seek help from clinicians before making and implementing these laws. Dr. Sidra discussed the Islamic legal provision of abortion before 120 days of gestation. She questioned the morality of society who does or does not accept a rape victim and her child but allows abortion. The whole group agreed that tolerance and understanding is required and the institutions must be strengthened by making thorough policies.

Anum Azhar said I believe our collective effort and response is what can possibly allow and foster an environment for rehabilitation. Dr. Sarosh insisted that the lawyers should not blindly accept the laws and should stand up with medical community to raise voice. Drs Saira, Afifa and Sidra all discussed the social morality and responsibility towards all these issues and their social and psychological effects on the victims.

All participants agreed with Ms. Anam that a collective effort is needed if we all wish to improve the legal and social system. Dr. Naseem Zafar shared the resources available for children through their organization Pehchan. Everyone appreciated that and agreed that all healthcare providers should be aware of the resources available for support.

**Suggestions:**

**Follow-up Required** The whole group agreed that we should raise our voices for this issue, collectively. Dr. Sharmeen will coordinate with the legal expert Ms. Anam and PBG will make a subgroup to work on legal reforms. Dr. Sharmeen will follow up on this issue in the next meeting.

Participants were encouraged to bring ethical issues to the discussion table without any hesitation.

**Adjournment:**

The Meeting was adjourned by the moderator Dr. Saadia with thanks to all attendees for support and encouragement.

**The date and timing of the next 12th PBG meeting are decided as 9th Dec 2022, at 9:30am (online).**

**Minutes documented by:**

Saadia Shahzad, Sadia Rao, & Sarosh Saleem