

## Review Article


# A Comparative Analysis of the Hippocratic Oath and Charak Oath in Medical Ethics

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## Abstract

Medical ethics serves as the cornerstone of the healthcare profession, guiding practitioners in their commitment to patient welfare and ethical decision-making. Two ancient ethical codes, the Hippocratic Oath and the Charak Oath, have significantly influenced medical ethics throughout history. This article undertakes a comprehensive comparative analysis of these ethical codes, examining their origins, principles, and applicability in the contemporary healthcare landscape.

## Key words

Hippocratic Oath, Charak Oath, Medical Ethics.

## Introduction

The Hippocratic Oath, attributed to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, is a seminal document in medical ethics. Its principles emphasize the physician's commitment to patient care, confidentiality, and the avoidance of harm. On the other hand, the Charak Oath, rooted in the ancient Indian Ayurvedic tradition, outlines ethical

guidelines for practitioners in the realm of traditional medicine.

## Origins and Historical Context

The Hippocratic Oath dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and is often considered the foundational document of Western medical ethics. It reflects the moral and ethical principles that governed the practice of

medicine in ancient Greece. In contrast, the Charak Oath finds its origins in the Charaka Samhita, an ancient Ayurvedic text attributed to the sage Charaka, estimated to have been written around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Both oaths emerge from distinct cultural and philosophical backgrounds, influencing their ethical precepts [1, 2].

### **Principles of the Hippocratic Oath**

The Hippocratic Oath begins with a solemn pledge to Apollo, the god of healing, and includes commitments to confidentiality, beneficence, and non-maleficence. Physicians swear to uphold the highest ethical standards, prioritizing the well-being of their patients above all else. The oath also addresses issues such as respecting patient autonomy and avoiding over-treatment [3].

### **Principles of the Charak Oath**

The Charak Oath, deeply rooted in the Ayurvedic tradition, emphasizes the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit. Practitioners taking the Charak Oath pledge to treat patients with compassion, employing a holistic approach that considers the individual's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. The oath also underscores the importance of lifelong learning and the continuous pursuit of knowledge [4].

## **A Comparative Analysis**

### **Universality vs. Cultural Specificity**

The Hippocratic Oath, with its emphasis on universal principles such as confidentiality and beneficence, is often considered applicable across diverse cultural contexts. In contrast, the Charak Oath's roots in Ayurveda may make it more culturally specific, with principles deeply embedded in the ancient Indian philosophical and medical traditions. The question arises: does a more

culturally specific oath limit its applicability in a globalized healthcare environment? [5].

### **Individual Autonomy vs. Holistic Care**

The Hippocratic Oath places a strong emphasis on individual autonomy, respecting patients' rights to make informed decisions about their care. On the other hand, the Charak Oath's emphasis on holistic care considers the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit. This raises the question of whether an approach that prioritizes individual autonomy or one that considers holistic well-being is more suitable for modern medical practice [6].

### **Ethical Guidelines for Research**

The Hippocratic Oath does not explicitly address issues related to medical research, while the Charak Oath encourages practitioners to engage in the continuous pursuit of knowledge. In the context of contemporary medical research ethics, does the absence of explicit guidelines in the Hippocratic Oath pose challenges, or does the Charak Oath's encouragement of knowledge pursuit adequately guide practitioners in the realm of research ethics? [7].

### **Current needs of ethics**

In present practice of medicine, one has to be updated with recent laws and regulations to meet the standard of practice. Various ethical issues in practice like consent [8], euthanasia [9], negligence [10], torture [11], organ donation [12], etc. need to be understood. Liabilities of doctors in consumer protection act [13], humanitarian practice of medicine [14], preserving ethical climate in hospital practice [15] and addressing issues related with medical records [16] are current needs.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, both the Hippocratic Oath and the Charak Oath have played pivotal roles in shaping medical ethics throughout history. The choice between the two may depend on cultural contexts, individual philosophical perspectives, and the evolving nature of healthcare. A nuanced understanding of these ethical codes allows practitioners to draw upon their principles to enhance patient care and uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct.

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