



MEDICOLEGAL BULLETIN

Week-4; Documentation in Obstetrics – What Courts Actually Look For

1. REAL LIFE CLINICAL SCENARIO

A 24-year-old primigravida underwent normal vaginal delivery. Postpartum, the patient developed postpartum hemorrhage which was managed with uterotonics and transfusion. The patient recovered. However, relatives later alleged negligence claiming delay in management. On review, the case sheet had minimal entries, no time stamps, and no clear sequence of events documented.

2. MEDICOLEGAL RISKS IN SUCH CASES

Inadequate documentation is one of the most common reasons doctors lose cases.

Common risks include:

- Inability to prove timely management
- Doubt about sequence of clinical events
- Allegations of delay or inaction
- Loss of credibility in court

Even correct treatment may appear negligent if records are incomplete.

3. WHAT THE LAW EXPECTS

Courts expect clear, contemporaneous, and consistent medical records. Documentation should reflect what was done, when it was done, and why it was done. Records should be legible, complete, and free from alterations. The medical record is treated as primary evidence in legal proceedings.

4. DOCUMENTATION – THE DOCTOR'S STRONGEST DEFENSE

Proper documentation should include:

- Time-stamped entries for all major events
- Vital signs and monitoring details
- Diagnosis and clinical findings
- Treatment given with dose and timing
- Response to treatment
- Communication with patient and relatives

Complete records establish a clear clinical timeline.



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5. PRACTICAL SAFE PRACTICE – WHAT TO DO

- Write notes in real time or as soon as possible
- Always include date and exact time
- Record all interventions with details
- Document senior consultation and advice
- Maintain legible handwriting or typed notes
- Ensure consistency across all records

6. COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Writing notes at end of shift from memory
- Missing time entries
- Illegible handwriting
- Overwriting or correction without signature
- Copy-paste or generic notes

Such errors weaken the doctor's defense significantly.

7. CLINICAL–LEGAL PEARL

Medical records are not just for continuity of care. They are the doctor's strongest legal protection.

8. REAL COURT CASE INSIGHTS (FOR UNDERSTANDING)

In multiple consumer court cases, doctors have been held liable primarily due to poor documentation rather than wrong treatment. Courts have repeatedly stated that absence of proper records raises presumption of negligence.

Judicial observations emphasize that well-maintained records reflect proper care, while incomplete records create doubt about the quality of treatment provided.

9. TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

In obstetrics, documentation is as important as treatment. Accurate, timely, and complete records protect the doctor and ensure better patient care. If it is not written, it is assumed not done.

Next Week's Topic: Hysterectomy – When It Becomes a Legal Case.



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