

## Editorial

### Medical ethics in the medieval Islamic sciences

During the medieval which is called the dark period of Western culture there were minimal scientific advancements in many aspects of medical and pharmaceutical sciences. In contrast, the Islamic culture in this period had its big boom. Although little attention was devoted to documenting all aspects of it, works produced during this period by the Islamic intellectuals have served as the basis for some aspects of Western Renaissance. Books, treatises, other types of manuscripts, and discussions have been translated into many languages and remained in use for hundreds of years after their creation. Although advanced, unfortunately, Muslims and their culture were not able to keep the places where they previously exist, and the best examples of this are the Moors.

Muslims not only assimilated the Persian and Greek science, but they fit it to their specific needs and way of thinking. It is not clearly drawn line of demarcation between the translated and original works, as many translators were also contributors too. Among them dominated two doctors and thinkers: Yuhann ibn-Masawayh (775-857 A.D.) and Hunayn ibn-Ishaq (809-873 A.D.). At that time, anatomical sciences were noticeably progressed by the experiments done by Yibril ibn-Bakhtishuh on monkeys, because according to the Islamic law, they could not dissect Muslims bodies. Special attention was also paid to the science of ophthalmology (researches of ibn-Masawayh), because in that period, there was a large number of widespread eye diseases. Muslims' interest in medical science was based on the tradition of the prophet (Prophet's medicine), which was equally covered both in theology and medicine, and doctors had to act in accordance with all the rules of morals. Muslim doctors at the same time were a metaphysician, philosopher, and sage, and in many instances a religious clergyman as well, so people

called them as "hakim" which transliterally means the person who knows the present knowledge of the need for human and life.

Muslims at this time (medieval period) significantly enhanced the use of drugs for curative purposes. They established the first specialized pharmacy unit in the hospitals, and pharmacy school was opened early and put together the first list of drugs and their use with their usage monographs. At that time, pharmacists had to undergo examinations for their expertise and professional skills. The same was the case with the doctors. It worth to note that due to the commitment of a case medical malpractice, the governor of the Islamic territory at 931 A.D. ordered Sinan ibn Thabit ibn-Qurra (chief physician) to take especial examination from all practicing physicians and to issue a testimony to those who meet the exam. Eight hundred and sixty physicians passed this exam in Baghdad, and the city abolished charlatanism. Also, on the orders of Ali ibn Isa, who was the vizier of the Caliph, Sinan organized the doctors for visiting people around the city and with drugs for helping patients in their own places. Other doctors had an obligation to perform daily visits to prisons and prisoners were also treated. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim hospitals had special units for women, each with its own dispensary, and all physicians were ought to comply with the rules for respecting the dignity of patients especially females.

Ethics in Islamic medicine begins to develop in larger-scale with arrival of Muslims in the area of Egypt and Persia, translating many of the earlier works from the Greek, Syrian, Persian sources into Arabic. Another important change in the field of medical ethics was the collection of materials on medical deontology whose most important purpose was to raise aid and engagement toward the sick with the help and assistance of the Almighty God.

The oldest surviving Islamic work of medical ethics is the work of Ishaq ibn Ali al-Ruhawi by the title of "Adab al-Tabib" ("Practical Doctor's Ethics" or "Practical Medical deontology") which seems to be based on the previous works of Hippocrates and Galen. Al-Ruhawi's thought that doctors are "guardians of souls and bodies," made him to write twenty chapters on various subjects related to medical

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ethics. This book (*Adab al-Tabib*) contained extensive instructions on mutual respect and moral obligations of physicians, nurses, patients, and other staffs. This work encouraged doctors to stay away from bad influences of people to realize that good character is much more important than wealth and to understand that wisdom is found in moral and perfect people. One of the most important obligations of doctors (in the opinion of this author's) is to be enough concerned about his own body and nurturing soul. Great emphasis was placed on the interaction of the spiritual and physical powers, stating in one part of the book that mental health is the most important part of health, and its violation can result in physical illness as well (analogous to the presently called psychosomatic illnesses). This resulted to call for the improvement of moral values. This book (*Adab al-Tabib*) also describes in detail the desired behavior where doctors must strive toward a better relationship with their patients, because it relieves unnecessary stress, and he must listen carefully to the patient. Doctors should not ignore any of the symptoms that the patient stated, because they can be of great importance in setting diagnosis. Furthermore, he describes that the doctor should be merciful to patients and that it can only be achieved by the fear from the Almighty God and he always should tell the truth and only works for the benefit of all (not himself).

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the prominent doctor in the Islamic territory was al-Farabi who was dedicated, first to the mental health and treatment. At the same time, Ibn-Miskawaih advocated the idea that the interests of other people should be put ahead of their own.

Islamic doctors had an idea that hiring someone else to perform medical diagnosis and perform patient care on behalf of themselves is not ethical. They also argued that the doctor should not treat the patient on another doctor's diagnosis, especially if his own diagnosis was different. When choosing his assistants, the doctor would need to choose one who is the most intelligent and respectful. Furthermore, before starting the treatment, the doctor would need to consider the benefits of the therapy, and the doctor is obliged to apply and do all the measure which can improve the health status of the patients.

*Adab al-Tabib* also describes the ideal day of a good doctor in the following manner: After awakening, the doctor needs to bathe, wash mouth and teeth, cut nails, hair, use deodorant, put on nice clothes, perform the prayer, and then start to visiting patients. A good doctor should keep its sleeping time to a minimum. The doctor, in order to be successful,

should deal only with their own medical job (not multiple jobs), and only earning enough money for a decent living for himself and his family. During taking the history of patients, the doctor should choose his words carefully. If necessary, the doctor should order for consultation with other physicians and patients can be treated with several doctors at the same time, with good cooperation of the attending physicians. The relationship between doctors and their subordinate staff should be harmonious and full of mutual respect. Al-Ruhawi describes the work of doctors as one of the most-dignified affairs, and the benefit of cash earnings should never be placed above the value of human life. During the study, physicians should learn to value human life and should not be hasty in making decisions to treat patients and not be lazy.

Chronologically, Islamic medical ethics seems to have considerable effects for the initiation and development of the European medical ethics in many of its aspects. Development of Islamic culture not only had significance for the Muslims nation, but was also the basis for the European Renaissance in many aspects. Following and respecting the principles of the Holy Quran, Islamic science, Islamic culture, and the art of practical medical ethics and the principles of moral issues brought to perfection. Physicians were encouraged to stay away from bad influences of people and were encouraged to understand that good character is much more important than wealth and to understand that the wisdom is found in moral and perfect people. Great emphasis was placed on the interaction of the spiritual and physical power with an emphasis on the idea that mental health must have priority over the body, and that its violation can result in physical illness. Along with these findings, Islamic sciences paid much attention dedicated to improve human moral values. Although all the achievements of Islamic science and philosophy for centuries are not paid too much attention, definitely they formed the basis for many aspects of our present knowledge especially in the field medical and pharmaceutical ethics.

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