

Medical Morality in Islamic Civilization

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Abstract

Medical ethics is based on two principles: science and ethical commitment and it presents a clear image of ethical values and tasks appropriate for a doctor in a community. Physicians' commitment to these spiritual principles – derived from religious lessons and experiences of well-known scholars of Islamic civilization – increases rate of their success in treatment of patients and plays an important role in effective communication between colleagues and social environment. In this article it has been tried to explain ethical values and principles briefly such as virtue and piety, trusteeship, respect and compassion, sacrificing, building trust, commitment, justice, modesty, meritocratic, avoiding jobbery, accepting critique and etc.

Keywords: medical ethics, Islamic civilization

Introduction:

Health of human's Soul and body is very important in religious teachings. Healthy body is considered as a proper bed for growth and prosperity of mind and thought and perfection of human's spirit, for this reason it is regarded as "God's Gift" and due to its effective role in health and welfare of human society, medical science was placed as one of the most useful and noblest science after religious sciences.

Islamic civilization gave privileged status to medical science and profession and outstanding figures were scout of this science in Islam world including Abu Ali Sina, Zakaria Razi and Ismaeel Jorjani. With growth of medical knowledge, medical ethics is one of the subjects which has been considered by sages, philosophers and physicians of Islamic era and was established in well-known medical texts of this era such as: Ibn Sina "Law", Razi "Alhavi" and Ahvazi "Advice Book".

Ethics in Islamic Civilization

"Ethics" lexically means habit and behavior and it is said to internal and spiritual features of mankind. Morality changes realm of human vision and directs to privacy and respect for others; hence it can be regarded as Model of successful communication with others. Medical ethics which is relied on dos and don'ts of doctor and his manner to others, includes principles and values that presents a clear image of internal commitment of doctor for environment (intrinsic and extrinsic). Commitment to these spiritual principles – which are derived from religious doctrines and experiences of well-known physicians and scholars of Islamic civilization – both increases the rate of success of physician in carrying out his job and plays an effective role in communication with colleagues in treating patients. It includes:

1- Virtue and piety:

The doctor who deals with life and property of people, for being protected from possible slips, he can trim himself with divine virtue.

2- Trust in God

Life and death are in power of god, so a doctor besides of his effort should rely on god for healing.

3- Commitment to religious values.

4- Secret-keeping and secrecy

Information of patients is trust to doctor, so his secrecy can protect personality and honor of patients. In a part of Hippocratic oath which muslim doctors and student of this field should take an oath by it, says: ".....those things which I see or hear at the time of treating my patients ... I avoid revealing them and I believe that we shouldn't reveal these kinds of things .." (History of Hospitals in Islam, p 54)

Zakaria Razi emphasized on it and said:" oh my son! It is worthy and important that a physician be a friend of people and be confident of their secrets, since some people hide their disease even from their closest relatives but they inevitably reveal it for doctors." (Advice and Promise in Medicine, p 67)

5- Skill and proficiency

Having knowledge, skill and capability are important conditions of entering this holly profession and a person without this skill and knowledge should avoid accepting this responsibility, since he threats health of patients and honour and dignity of doctors

would be deteriorated. Imam Sadeq mentions: “every owner of profession should have 3 characteristics: 1- He should be proficient in his work 2- he should be trustworthy 3- he should make interest in that person wants to apply. (Tohafol Oghool, p238)

In a contrastive and comparative expression, Razi reminded the threat of those doctor-like people who lack skill and expertise and wrote: “ ... you should know that robbers and thieves are better than those pretender doctors but not real doctors, because robbers steal properties but doctor-like people do many things to the life of people...”(Advice and Promise in Medicine, p 98)

6- Keeping training and researching

Exploiting new knowledge and continuous effort increase the success of doctor and facilitates treatment.

7- Avoiding jealousy

Jealousy makes piece away from doctor and it reinforces suspicion and mistrust in medical society.

8- Respecting patient

Respecting patient increases dignity of doctor and has positive effects on soul and body of patient.

9- Sacrificing:

Sacrificing shows dignity and honor of doctor and it is the highest human behavior.

10- Creating trust in action

Trust in doctor is the most important social capital for them. This capital is the result of honesty, precision, and ethical and practical report of doctors and it provides doctors to climb the summit of success.

11- sincerity (in case of women)

It is worthy to doctor treat women with decency.

12- Humility and modesty

Modesty towards patient and co-workers makes doctor glorify and popular among people. Based on religious teachings, Razi emphasized on modesty and kindness in increasing attraction and success of doctors and said: “...you should know that in this job modesty in the form of soft and nice words and avoiding bad-tempered is art and beauty. Every doctor who behaves like this will be prosperous.” (Advice and Promise in Medicine, p 100)

13- Kindness and compassion

Doctor is a friend of patient and with kindness and courtesy he brings hope and mirth to patients. In an Islamic Hadith we read: “once Hippocrates said to his student: let your given love, your devotion to their work, your awareness about their conditions be your behavioral tools to people.” (p 208)

14- Commitment to accountability culture

Believing in responding to society is an important medical ethics.

According to it, society has the right to ask doctor about his behavior and doctor should consider answering it as his ethical duty.

15- Accepting criticism

Accepting criticism prepares development and rejecting criticism begins Stagnation and inaction.

16- Feeling of responsibility and commitment

Doctor is responsible of patient and he knows his treatment as his duty.

17- Justice –oriented

Doctor should be fair in treating rich and poor patient. His effort should not increase or decrease. Patient is a human whether poor or rich. We can see from practical report of Islamic doctors that they helped poor people more and if they needed, doctors gave them monthly salary for treatment.

18- Abstain from alcohol

Vinosity reduces doctor's personality and it increases his error and slip during treatment.

19- Avoiding Jobbery

In belief of Islamic scholars, medicine is not a business and a physician is not a business man. Therefore it is not appropriate for a doctor to consider just material things and fame-seeking. Rahavi, author of Adib-otabib or "Practical Ethics of Doctor" believes that: "Art of medicine is honourable and a doctor is not trying to get money but he tries to get everlasting joy, reputation and infinite rewards of god." (Advice and Promise in Medicine, pp 214-215)

20- Respecting patient's privacy

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