

EDITORIAL

“Characteristics of a Muslim Physician”

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Have you ever asked yourself “Why is a Muslim Physician different from any other physician”? Having reflected on this question from time to time I came to the following conclusions. Perhaps your reasons will completely differ from mine. Furthermore, you may entirely disagree with my reasons but nonetheless I would like to share my thoughts with you.

FAITH

Faith is the first pillar of Islam. Belief in Allah (S.W.T.) and his Prophet (P.B.U.H.) are fundamentals of the Islamic faith. All of us who declare ourselves as Muslims vouch and declare this faith. How is this applicable to a physician?

Physicians must realize that irrespective of knowledge and expertise the final common pathway that determines the success or failure of any modality of treatment is **not** scientific logic or deduction but the will of Allah (S.W.T.). If one can accept this fact, in spite of being a physician, it augurs towards reiteration of Faith. With this comes the realization of the **limit of one's own resources**. When we prescribe a medication or perform surgery we attribute the success or failure to our expertise or lack of it; when in essence it is the result of divine intervention. If any physician has doubts about this statement, perhaps they can give an explanation for the cases in which he expects to see a particular result and an exact opposite result ensues!

PRAYER

Prayer is a fundamental function of every Muslim. As a Muslim Physician perhaps it has a special significance. A physician deals with sick, elderly and often times a dying patient. Pain and suffering is a common day to day occurrence. Yet we most often forget to include our patients in our prayers.

Allah (S.W.T.) is Magnanimous, Merciful, Omnipotent. Your prayer never goes unheeded if the appeal is zealous, sincere and truthful. It will be answered. It would be appropriate for a physician to start his treatment in the name of Allah (S.W.T.) and then at each prayer remember his patient and ask for his/her quick recovery and success of his treatment.

All this may sound quite mundane and superfluous but how many Muslim Physicians can say that they have made this their practice?

KNOWLEDGE

Although knowledge is limitless, to seek knowledge is every Muslim's birthright. “Seek knowledge to the ends of China” states a well authenticated Hadith. A Muslim physician should be well versed in **Islamic Knowledge** in addition to the scientific knowledge which is fundamental to every physician. Many Muslim physicians excuse themselves from not knowing Islamic subjects on the grounds that they have so much to learn of their own science that they are unable to devote time to Islamic subjects, which they feel are best left to Islamic Scholars. I think that this is a gross error which needs immediate correction. One should have an in-depth knowledge of Islam so that it can be applied in not only day to day decisions but also in every aspect of medicine, e.g. the patient/physician relationship, prescription of drugs containing prohibited substances, maintaining ethical business relationships with our colleagues, etc.

There is also one other particular knowledge that many of us, either knowingly or unknowingly, have failed to acquire. I am referring to the knowledge of **ISLAMIC MEDICINE**. As you are aware, Islamic Medicine was the ultimate form of Medicine for almost 1000 years. Today we know very little of Islamic Medicine because our texts contain very few references to it. The little that is written is mostly derogatory and states that very few, if any, original contributions were made during this period. Nothing can be farther from the truth. These statements have been made and allowed to stand because Islamic Physicians have not challenged them. Presumably because they themselves lack the necessary knowledge of the Islamic History of Medicine.

What is now termed “Modern Medicine” can trace it's roots to the work, expertise and authorship of countless Muslim Physicians and Scholars. These latter scientists not only preserved the words of the “Ancients” but added extensive original contributions which enrich the Art and Science of Medicine with fundamentally new concepts. Modern Medicine developed from this solid foundation.

The concept of a “university” where medicine could be taught along with strict licensure requirements to practice medicine evolved during the Muslim era. The science of Chemistry and Pharmacology originated during this era as countless medicines were “discovered,” tried, and catalogued as to their effects and side effects. The concept of a hospital as a treatment center for the sick evolved during the era of Islamic Medicine.

Unfortunately, we are not the carriers of this storehouse of Medical knowledge today; as we seek our

medical knowledge from Western sources. The real knowledge lies buried in the libraries at the Bodelian in Oxford, the British Museum in London, the Bibliotheque National in Paris, and the Smithsonian in Washington. Should we not be the ones to unearth it?

PRACTICE

Practice can be defined as **repetitive performance of an acquired skill**. Thus, practice requires acquisition and then repetitive performance. Islamic attributes are extremely easy to learn but difficult to put into practice. Most of us are born Muslims and take our religion for granted and hence usually get far from it in practice. Unless we practice Islam we cannot set an example.

The one person who exemplified the practice of Islam was our beloved Prophet (P.B.U.H.). He not only brought us the word of Allah (S.W.T.) but showed how one could live by every word of it and apply it to **every aspect of our daily and professional lives**.

The Muslim Physician should thus strive to implement the practice of Islam in not only his daily life but also his **profession**. This may be difficult at first but repetitiveness will make him perfect. Thus a Muslim physician should become a role model for all others to follow by his purity, ascetism, charity, patience, generosity, kindness, knowledge and eagerness to help and share.

CHARITY

In the eyes of Allah (S.W.T.) charity by every Muslim is as important if not more important than Salaat. Wherever Salaat is mentioned in the Holy Quran Zakaat is also invariably mentioned. Thus Allah (S.W.T.) regards Charity as much as an act of glorifying Him as Salaat or prayer. Charity does not have to be synonymous with financial aid. A smile, a comforting word, and a good deed can also be an act of charity. The importance of visiting a sick person is exemplified in the words of Allah (S.W.T.) in the Holy Quran. As a physician, one gets a daily opportunity to perform this charity. It is the daily necessity to visit the sick. When we treat these patients as a "Congestive Heart Failure," an "Acute Gall Bladder" or "Multiple Trauma" without an identity, we fail in our daily charity. Medicine in America is practiced much like a business or like dealing in a commodity. The result being that the patient/physician relationship hardly exists like it did in years past. We are already seeing the result of this in the ever increasing amount of Malpractice Suits. Is this because we have forgotten our daily "Charity"?

Charity affects our practice in other ways as well. Often we are called upon to treat patients who are indigent. Many times I have heard a colleague moan and groan because he had to treat an indigent patient. However, to a Muslim Physician such service should not only be pleasant but acceptable as an act of worship with rewards Inshalla in the hereafter rather than in cash today. Thus, it is imperative for him to pay as much or a greater amount of attention to such a patient and his well being for the rewards will come from Him!

PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

A Muslim is called upon by Allah (S.W.T.) to bear his misfortunes by patience and perseverance. Perhaps a physician faces more setbacks than any other professional or individual in his profession but if he obeys the command of Allah (S.W.T.) he can hope to be stable psychologically and suffer less from the strains of his profession.

BROTHERHOOD

Brotherhood in Islam is Universal. One of the greatest beauties of Islam as a religion is the fact that Islam does not see any color, caste, or creed. As a physician, you are in a privileged position to help the sick. You are also an expert in your field. Let your expertise help your brothers too! The Muslim Ummah is spread around the globe. Many of our nations are poor, underprivileged, sickness and disease is rampant, natural disasters are common and devastating. Have you ever thought how you can help?

As a physician in a highly advanced and rich country like the United States you have a position that enables you to earn a good income. You can definitely help financially if you so decide. I am sure many of you do this.

The other way that a physician can help his brethren is by providing his **knowledge and expertise**. What greater sharing than your knowledge and expertise? Of course we can share this valuable commodity if we sincerely decide to do this. It takes an extra effort. Some of the venues are as follows: Visit one of the poorer countries as a visiting lecturer, establish a clinic in your home country or perhaps write an article in a journal that is distributed to such countries. A good example is the Journal of Islamic Medical Association (J.I.M.A.) All of the above ideals are some of the foundation principles of the Islamic Medical Association. Many times each one of us has a good intention but to put this intention into practice is what is difficult. It is in this circumstance that a coordinated and combined effort becomes successful. **The I.M.A. is such an effort**. So join the Islamic Medical Association and put your good intentions to work, increase your brotherhood.