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Chapter Ten

Integrating Religiosity into the Health Sector: The Relevance of Islamic Values to Medical Ethics

R. Ibrahim Adebayo

Introduction

All human actions in Islam are established upon the doctrine of *khilafah* which is epitomized in man's recognition of the fact that he is only sojourning in this life for a while and that sooner or later, he will have to report back to his Lord to render account of his deeds on earth. The principle is equally premised upon realization that whatever man has and attains in this world, is a trust which he has to discharge conscientiously for him to win the pleasure of the Real Owner -Allah. Religiosity however, is a strong mechanism for achieving this principle of vicegerency. From the Islamic perspective, every minute of the Muslim's life is dominated by Islam as his daily activities are regulated by it. This is why worship in Islam is not limited to the observance and adherence to the routine rituals alone. It goes beyond *jihad* against oppression or other meritorious religious engagements but entails both covert and overt dimensions.

In the history of Islam, human, spiritual, mental and physical well-being of the *ummah* had received special attention of those in authority. All aspects of human well-being had been extensively explicated by Muslim leaders. This was so in view of the fact that both moral health and physical health are interwoven that one is difficult to divorce from the other. A confirmation of this was made by Rahman when he says:

In Islam, ethical health is part of general health, and unless a person has good, positive, and balanced morals, he or she cannot maintain general health either. Thus, both moral health and physical health become, from this perspective, a direct medical concern.¹

Speaking in the same vein, Larimore observed that:

... .health is more than just physical health. It is a balance of physical, emotional, relational and spiritual health, in such a way as to obtain the highest level of health....²

It therefore becomes imperative for Muslims in the health sector to keep abreast of the teachings of their religion, as they affect their profession. Muslim scholars on the other hand should not limit their researches and teachings to the spiritual well being of people alone. Rather, their physical and bodily health must be taken care of as well. The bottom line of this is that religion and science are so inter-related that an attempt to separate the two is like an attempt at separating the soul from the body.

It is interesting to note that the numerous conferences and workshops on science and religion have manifested the interplay of orientation between hitherto assumed dichotomous disciplines. One lasting effect of these conferences, seminars and workshops is that they have brought into limelight the appreciable contributions of Muslims to all branches of knowledge including health-related disciplines. On this basis, we strongly uphold that medical ethics can further be enhanced if Islamic ethical values can be integrated into the system. This paper therefore intends to demonstrate the possibility of the integration of the Islamic values, for the health sector to achieve the status of promoting physical and spiritual health in the nation.

Muslims and the Development of Hospital

The advances in science and medicine became manifest in Islamic history when the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid (705 -715C.E) established institutions for lepers and the blind in Damascus. It was however during the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 C.E) that real hospitals were established in every nook and cranny of the Caliphate. There were First Aid stations usually established near mosques, mobile clinics

meant for proper medical care of people living in villages, military hospitals, city hospitals, mental hospitals, jail hospitals and female hospitals.³ Among such hospitals were the Nuri Hospital in Baghdad (1154C.E), Monsuri Hospital in Cairo (1279C.E), Adudi Hospital in Baghdad (981 C.E) and Marakiah Hospital in North Africa (1200C.E). Giving a vivid description of a typical Muslim hospital of the medieval period, Nowsheravi, writes:

Indoor departments had spacious wards separate for male and female patients for each specialty like Medicine, Surgery, Orthopaedics, Eye, Gynecology, Obstetrics and Convalescent etc. There were separate wards for fever and diarrhea cases, under the charge of a specialist and they all worked under the administrative control of the "Director of Hospital" who was selected from amongst the physicians and surgeons of great ability and fame. They had the charge of administration, supervision and custody of all supplies; drugs, linen furniture and installations.⁴

Speaking on the administrative set-up as well as amenities in a typical hospital in Islamic civilization, Sibai has this to say:

.....The hospital rooms and wards were neat and tidy with a regular supply of water in abundance. These rooms were furnished with clean carpets. Every hospital had a sanitary inspector and accountants and other executive staff.⁵

The paraphernalia of hospitals established by Muslims included pharmacy, dispensary, store rooms, attendants of both sexes, a large administrative staff, lecture apartments, a mosque and a library. Al-Mansuri Hospital in Egypt is said to have facilities to accommodate 8,000 patients, with separate wards for fever, ophthalmia, surgical cases, dysentery, to mention but a few.⁶ While discussing the achievements of Muslims in the field of medicine and sciences, Lemu writes:

They (the Muslims) made advances in the use of drugs, herbs and food for medication; established hospitals, with a system of interns and externs; discovered the causes of certain diseases and developed correct diagnoses of them; proposed new concepts of hygiene, made use of anesthetics in surgery with newly innovated surgical tools; and introduced the science of dissection in Anatomy.⁷

Apart from their efforts in establishing hospitals, many books were written on hospital administration. Ar-Razi wrote the *Sifat al-Bimaristan* (Requirements of Hospital), while Zahid-ul-Ulama wrote the *Kitabul-Bimaristan* (Book of Hospital).⁸ Evidence abound that quite a good number of medicines and herbs still retain their Arabic, Indian or Persian names. Such include alcohol, alkali, arsenic, apricot, alkanet, to mention but a few. Also, the medical talent of Muhammad ibn Zakariah ar-Razi was demonstrated at the instance of establishment of a hospital in Baghdad. In order to determine a healthy place for the location of the hospital, ar-Razi visited every section of the town and hung up a piece of meat at each of the section to determine the extent of infectious diseases in the neighbourhood. He completed this experiment by concluding that the place where the portion of meat was the last to putrefy and develop infectious bacteria was appropriate site for the hospital.⁹ If the Muslims could have attained such an enviable status at that period, one can courageously say that medicine and other related disciplines, establishment of hospitals and their management are not alien to the Muslims and that by the time they were swimming in the ocean of knowledge, the Europeans were fast asleep in the room of ignorance. It is however quite amazing at the great and serious dichotomy between the scientific creativity of the Muslims of the past and of the present. One wonders how the once landlord of the house of knowledge lost the key of the house to tenants and allowed himself to become a stranger in the house.

Islamic Ethics and its Relevance to Medical Ethics

The comprehensive nature of Islam is acknowledged in its unification of every aspect of human life with no discrimination between spiritual and mundane. As a way of life, Islam encourages proper understanding of the physical and spiritual environments of the world. It understands the fact that unless physical environment is maintained, the inner or spiritual health could not be guaranteed. A means of maintaining physical health is to take proper care of those who are sick as well as those who sustain injury through any means. This was practically demonstrated during the battle of *Uhud* where 'Aishah was seen

running here and there in the battle field carrying water to the wounded. Apart from alleviating sufferings of fellow beings, the Islamic teaching of showing love, kindness, care and support to others was demonstrated by her.

Ever before the 1948 Declaration of Geneva, which was a modern simplification of the Hippocratic Oath, Islam had recorded quite a good number of physicians who were guided by the religion on matters related to their profession. A good example of this was Hunayn ibn Ishaq, a court physician during the Abbasid Caliphate, who was asked by a notorious ruler, Al-Mutawakkil (847 - 861 C.E) to prepare poison to kill a person who opposed his administration. Hunayn rejected the request, and when he was asked the reason for his refusal, he answered: Two things - my religion and my profession. My religion decrees that we should do good even to our enemies, how much more our friends; and my profession is instituted for the benefit of humanity and limited to their relief and cure. Besides, every physician is under oath never to give anyone a deadly medicine.¹⁰

Based on the above response of Hunayn, we are satisfied to submit that some Islamic ethical values will be of great benefit for better performance of medical personnel. Therefore, some of these values as they affect the health sector are enumerated and discussed below.

i. Sacredness of Life

Islam does not only consider killing of human beings one of the greatest sins, but also high-rates a person who saves a life liking it to saving the lives of all mankind.(Qur'an 5:32) The respect for human life was seriously emphasized by the Prophet in his Farewell Pilgrimage and accorded such respect as given to the Day of pilgrimage, month of Dhul-Hijjah and the respect accorded the city of Makkah. In the same vein, the Qur'an enjoins that children should not be killed on the plea of want.(Qur'an 6:151) On the basis of this, preservation of human life right from the time of conception up to the time of breathing one's last should be given optimum attention by doctors and others in the medical and health sector. Killing of embryo through abortion in order to earn quick money should be declared a serious crime against humanity. Its legality in some countries is as bad as legalizing murder. It is only where a pregnancy

is medically examined and found to endanger the life of the mother that abortion could be carried out.¹¹ Through abortion, the woman is exposed to a variety of complications ranging from severe hemorrhage, perforation of the womb, which can lead to her death instantly or lead to complication of infection that can eventually block her tube and render her infertile.

Apart from the sacredness of human soul, human body is expected to be dealt with, with dignity, honor and respect. There is no doubt that some Qur'anic verses discuss human anatomy and as well enjoin Muslims to undertake studies on it. (Qur'an 25:3-4, 51:20-21, 87:1-2 and 90:8-9) On the basis of this, we are of the opinion that the use of cadavers for medical training should not be considered out of Islam, since such training will culminate in relieving the living ones eventually. Likewise, autopsy carried out by pathologists could help in finding out the real cause of death, hence guard against future occurrence of such. Therefore, post-humus examination of dead bodies could not be considered un-Islamic especially when such examination is done with due respect, honor and privacy to the body concerned.

The hand of honor and dignity should be extended to the treatment of the patients by personnel of opposite sex. It is the practice in the medical clinics that patients are attended to by doctors and nurses without consideration for the sex of the patients. The case is so, degenerated that male doctors diagnose and examine genito-urinary or gynecological conditions of female patients and vice-versa. This is against the spirit of Islam, which enjoins both male and female to lower their gaze and guard their chastity and strictly emphasizes segregation of the sexes. The Qur'an emphatically mentions it that women should not expose their nakedness to anybody except to their husbands. (Qur'an 24:30-31) A faithful woman therefore becomes distressed if examined by a male doctor. Likewise, the fasting of a male doctor who carries out vagina examination during Ramadan is at stake. So also is that of the female patient. This view is equally shared by Medermott and Ahsan when they observed that:

The Muslim, male and female, is extremely shy about being naked and very reluctant to expose private parts except in extreme cases. Therefore, a medical consultation

which disregards these delicate facts is likely to be an unhappy experience for the patient and a difficult exercise for the consultant.¹²

So, the dignity and honor of manhood and womanhood could be sustained in an ideal situation where a female medical personnel attends to female patients and a male medical personnel attends to male patients. It is only in the absence of this ideal situation that Islam permits otherwise.

ii. Service to Humanity

The Qur'anic extension of *Iman* to acts of benevolence to mankind is a manifestation of the close link between the two. The consciousness of Allah, no doubt, reflects in man's interaction with those in his environment. That in some verses of the Qur'an, *zakat* is closely mentioned next to *salat* is an indication that prayer to God without being accompanied by acts of benevolence or service of humanity renders such a prayer meaningless and faithless. The Qur'an considers service to humanity a herculean task difficult to accomplish than even prayer to God, when it reads:

And (have We not) pointed out to him (man) the two conspicuous ways? But he attempts not the uphill road is? It is to free a slave, or to feed in a day of hunger, an orphan nearly related, or the poor man lying in the dust. (Qur'an 90:11-16)

In line with the submission of Hunayn ibn Ishaq, medical profession is a service of humanity. In this manner, it becomes an ethical obligation of a doctor towards the sick to give necessary treatment in any emergence and to demonstrate his ethical profession of preserving human life from the time of conception until death. He should avoid unfriendly attitudes, which could force patients to either go to private hospitals with their heavy unaffordable bills, or prefer to be treated by quacks, or rather resort to self-medication.

The non-recognition of the fact that service to humanity is service to God by the medical personnel is demonstrated in the incessant industrial actions embarked upon by doctors and nurses while demanding for their needs from the government. During the period,

patients are grossly neglected even when they are at the point of death. Through this attitude, many sick ones have lost their lives, many pregnant women have suffered hardship during labor and this has cost some women their lives or the lives of the babies. Lamenting on reasons for doctors' strike actions, a Professor of repute, who happens to be the first Nigerian to pass the membership examination of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in July 1951, has this to say:

It is very sad that doctors should go on strike. It was once possible for a doctor to go on low pay or no pay at all. It is no longer possible in view of the high rate of inflation and the very high cost of living. When doctors ask for better conditions of living, government has said on various occasions that improved conditions of service for doctors will upset the wage structure in the country.....These are sad days for the profession not only in this country but also abroad where doctors have only recently started to strike.¹³

In view of the hardship the patients encounter during doctors strike, we want to advise that such strike should be partial and not total and if it is to be total, it should be limited to certain non-life threatening areas like refusal to sign certificates, bearing in mind that "he who saves a single life, it is as if he has saved the entire mankind".(Qur'an 5:33) The Geneva Declaration on International Code of Medical Ethics equally stipulates that, "a doctor must give emergency care as a humanitarian duty unless he is assured that others are willing and able to give such care." In line with this, we subscribe to the suggestion of a medical doctor that rather than total strike action by medical personnel, a withdrawal of services in one or two departments in one hospital and in some other departments in other hospitals would assist.¹⁴

(iii) **Character Building**

The acknowledgement of the Prophet's uprightness, truthfulness and honesty by his friends and foes to the point of being given the nickname *al-Amin* -the faithful one, is an attestation to the fact that he was a paragon of virtues worthy of emulation. The Qur'an, which

is an embodiment of character training, lays down the basis of a society in which everyone is expected to relate well with those he comes in contact with. This is epitomized in the Shari'ah which sets down the scale of values for every action (i.e. whether it is lawful or unlawful); commands every member of the society to do good and shun all evils and makes every institution of the society goal-and-value-oriented, in addition to creating a conducive atmosphere for its efficient and effective operation.¹⁵

Extension of mutual love and mercy to the sick, as well as proper attendance to their needs is one of the virtues enjoined by Islam. Developing positive attitude to them is encouraged in a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah where the Prophet stated that Allah would say on the Day of Resurrection:

O son of Adam! I fell ill but you visited Me not. He will say: How could I visit You while You are the Lord of the Worlds? Allah will say: Did you not know that My slave so-and-so was sick but you visited him not? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you could have found Me by him?¹⁶

The reward for visiting a sick person is further stressed by the Prophet when he says:

No Muslim visits a sick Muslim in the morning but 70,000 angels seek forgiveness for him up till evening, and if he visits him in the evening, 70,000 angels seek forgiveness for him till morning.¹⁷

In view of the above, the medical personnel are expected to see their profession as a service to humanity as well as service to God. As a doctor or a nurse, he can alleviate the fear of isolation of a person who is admitted to his hospital by his constant attendance to him. He should make himself available to support the family of the sick when necessary. He communicates and listens to them knowing fully well that they are in a strange environment.

One of the virtues enjoined by Islam is secrecy. The Prophet frowned at revealing other person's secret when he said that on the Day of Judgment Allah would divulge the secret of whoever divulges the secret of the fellow Muslim while on earth. By implication, it is a

plain truth that a sick person solely depends on those who treat and take care of him. He tells the doctor everything he wants to know about him for diagnosis and treatment purposes. Such information is to be treated with utmost confidentiality. He can only reveal information he has obtained in the course of his professional relationship with the patient with his consent. Under no circumstance should he secretly videotape, record or take photographs of his patient for the purpose of teaching and research unless he is permitted to do so by him.

As part of character building, the medical personnel are expected to work as a team for the preservation of human life. They should create conducive friendly environment and show utmost courtesy to one another by demonstrating professional respect to other colleagues. They need to come to the aid of one another whenever the situation demands, so as to save the life of the patient.

As a corollary to the above, the medical personnel are enjoined to shun all sorts of hypocrisy. This could be in form of false certification or false attestation whereby a doctor issues a friend a sick certificate or writes on a certificate what is not true. This can be used against such a doctor. In addition, the practice of some traditional medical doctors who have formed the habit of deceiving people through radio and television advertisements and fascinating signboards is against the ethics of the health sector. Most of these people attribute to themselves what they could not do with the aim of gaining an advantage over fellow practitioners. This indeed is a clear sign of hypocrisy as mentioned by the Prophet.

It needs to be mentioned that some vices abhorred by Islam are of relevance to character building as they affect the health sector. For instance, it would amount to colossal negligence on the part of a doctor who diagnoses or treats a patient under the influence of drinks or drugs. In the same vein, it is an illegal act for a doctor to use his clinic or hospital as a base for illegal acts such as abortion or a hiding place for criminals.¹⁸

It should also be observed that the organizational structure of clinics and hospitals where both male and female medical personnel are on night duty together creates an opportunity for adultery and fornication among them. The treatment of a patient by a doctor or

nurse of the opposite sex equally paves way for indecency and improper conduct among them. In such a case, Islam enjoins avoidance of people of opposite sex in a secluded area or office, and where unavoidable, a third party should be in attendance.

Negligence is a serious vice, which could have devastating effects on the society. It is more grievous in a matter, which affects human life. This explains why in the medical field, more caution needs to be taken to guard against negligence as it can breed hardship and loss of lives. Examples of professional negligence as listed by Uzodike include failure to attend promptly to a patient requiring urgent attention, a doctor's failure to examine a patient properly before he begins treatment, incorrect diagnosis, risk from operation and drugs and mistakes in treatment of the patients.¹⁹ The summary of what has been discussed so far is contained in the following words of advice of a physician to his colleagues:

The physician should not be slanderous or addicted to liquor. He should speak no evil of man of repute in the community or be critical of their religious practices and commitments. He ought to be honest toward women and should not divulge the secrets of his patients, joke or make a fuss of others at improper places and times. He should avoid being critical and speak well of his acquaintances, colleagues and clients. He should not be a money grabber. He should dress in clean clothes, be dignified and groom his hair neatly. He ought not to lose his temper easily when speaking with his patients or their folks, especially when they shower him with many questions. He should have a lot of patience and his answers should be gently. He should render the best professional service he can to his client, whether weak or strong, poor or rich, learned or illiterate and God will reward him for any medical help he offers to his poor patients.²⁰

Religious Role of Ideal Muslim Medical Personnel

Apart from taking care of the patients medically, a medical personnel has some spiritual and religious duties to offer the patient. For instance, simple prayer at the bedside of a sick person may bring comfort to a distraught patient. He can assist his patient spiritually by cooling

down his emotion, which due to his present condition may become unduly irritable, childish and upset by things he would not normally notice. The patient may be tempted to abandon his faith in God due to prolonged anxiety, suffering and hardship. It then becomes the responsibility of a conscious Muslim nurse or doctor to counsel the sick with relevant portions of the Qur'an, to admonish him on the calamities that had befallen some Prophets and how Allah had saved and healed them from such calamities and illness due to their steadfastness and strong belief in Him. Through constant visit and admonition, the agony of mind of the patient, which might aggravate his condition, will be relieved.

A conscious medical personnel is expected to educate his patient on the need to observe the five daily prayers. He encourages him by providing him with water for ablution and prayer mat. He should be advised to perform *tayammam* where the use of water can affect his health adversely. He should let him understand that no matter the condition of a sick person, so far as he is still conscious and not mentally disturbed, he must worship his Creator. He can observe the prayer while standing without reclining, or with reclining and if he cannot do this, can sit without reclining or with reclining. If he is unable to stand on his feet, he can perform his *salat* lying on his right side. If this is not easy, he may lie on his left side or even observe it while lying on his back. If he is unable to pray in any of these positions and prays in another convenient posture, his *salat* is still valid.²¹

The case, which involves pregnancy and childbirth, is a matter of life and death. The Qur'an expresses the fact that both the pregnancy and its delivery take place with difficulty and hardship (Qur'an 46:15) and so a Muslim nurse is expected to perform her religious role to allay the patient's anxiety. As much as possible, a female nurse should take delivery of a Muslim expectant mother. Mere pronouncement of *Audhu billah mina ash-shaytanir-rajim, Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim* meaning, "I seek refuge from the Allah against the accursed devil. In the name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful", by a Muslim nurse gives a sign of relief to the expectant mother. After delivery, the navel cord (placenta) should not be disposed off in the waste bin or in the drain bin. It must be buried properly.

A conscious Muslim nurse or doctor needs to educate her patient that she does not need to delay her prayers till after forty days. Rather, she has to resume her prayers immediately the postnatal bleeding (*nifas*) stops, as there is no minimum period for *nifas*. It may be for a day or even a single drop after the birth of the child. In case the blood persists after forty days, then it ceases to be *nifas* but *istihada* (bleeding due to illness) and so the mother needs to resume her prayers even with it. At both instances, she needs to be educated that *nifas* ritual bath has to be taken by her before she commences prayers.

A Muslim medical personnel has a role to play on a newly born baby. In addition to washing the body, a conducive Islamic environment can be created in form of ensuring that the first sound the child hears is Islamic in nature. As such, a conscious Muslim doctor or nurse can make the call to prayer- *adhan* in the right ear and another call signifying the commencement of the prayer- *iqamah*-in the left ear of the child.²² Where the condition of either the mother or the baby is terrible that she is not discharged from the hospital before the naming day, then the naming rites can be carried out by competent Muslim medical personnel in the hospital.

A Muslim medical personnel also has some roles to play when a patient begins to suspect that he could not survive again. In such a case, he is to console him with gentle words. The Prophet is reported to have done so to his uncle, 'Abbas saying:

My uncle! Don't give up to death, for if you are a righteous person and your life is spared, you will have the opportunity of improving on your righteousness and that will benefit you. And if you are a sinner and your life is spared, you will be opportune to seek for repentance and that too is lucrative for you. So, don't give up to death.²³

The creedal statement of Islam -*kalimatu-sh-shahadah* should also be pronounced to the dying one with the expectation that he says it after him. If eventually the final end comes, he is expected to close the eyes of the deceased, adjust his lips accordingly, straighten his head, stretch his joints and properly cover the entire corpse with clean cloth.

It has to be mentioned that religious consciousness of a Muslim medical personnel should be felt in his dressing and physical

appearance. The practice of wearing tightly fitting or transparent uniform as well as leaving the head uncovered by female doctors or nurses is against the spirit of Islam which enjoins believing women to wear their outer garments over their persons.²⁴ Stressing the significance of dressing Islamically, Rabi'at Ajanah expresses her personal experience thus:

My experience as a Muslim nurse, dressed like a Muslim woman allows me to command a lot of respect from the general public, my patients and from non-Muslims and this is a true experience confirming the above verse of the Qur'an (Qur'an 33: 59).²⁵

A Muslim is not expected to act contrary to the dictates of his religion in order to satisfy his professional ethics, Ajanah says further:

Why should a woman who covers her hair while praying inside her room come out to her office exposing the same hair? What sense does that make to us? We have to think and change.²⁶

Conclusion

Islam is a culture, which embraces all aspects of life. A Muslim is expected to imbibe this culture and must be ready to practice it wherever he finds himself. A doctor is a doctor and a nurse is a nurse, but a Muslim doctor or nurse is a doctor or nurse of difference. While discharging his duty, he is conscious that he is carrying out Allah's injunctions. Apart from the meal ticket he receives on this earth, his reward in the hereafter has no measure so far as he carries out his duty religiously. To do this, it is our considered opinion that our Colleges of Medicine and other related institutions and faculties should introduce some courses and make at least two of such courses compulsory, namely 'Muslims' Contributions to Sciences' and 'Islamic Medical Ethics' to acquaint medical students with the sources of the modern medicine and to assist them to be more dedicated and maintain high moral standard when they eventually pass out of the institution. Also, government should allow Muslim medical personnel to uphold the tenets of their religion while practicing their profession. In this wise, Muslim nurses and others, especially women should be allowed to dress in accordance with the dictates of Islam.

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