

MEDICAL ETHICS — HUMANE AND HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALTH

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There are two ways of looking at health issues of patients. One is the scientific way of practicing evidence-based medicine that has developed as the main approach to managing health problems. This is the backbone of modern medicine that is in vogue in the west and is increasingly gaining ground in the developing world. Evidence-based-medicine has become a standard practice everywhere and is vigorously taught in medical schools and colleges.

The scientific method is rational and is based on objectively observable of disease and its management. It is based on the knowledge of basic medical sciences and the changes that are encountered in the structure and function of human organs as a result of disease. The scientific approach also looks at the causes of disease, which are objectively proven. The scientific medicine offers a large variety of methods of investigations that help in discovering the precise diagnoses. Once the diagnosis is proved only those methods of treatment are applied which have been objectively proven by evidence. The scientific way is excellent because it carries the least chances of a wrong diagnoses or wrong treatment and offers the best chance of recovery from disease.

However, the drawback of scientific medicine is that it looks at human body like a machine and the doctor dental surgeon is its maintenance engineer. Moreover, the practice of scientific medicine/dentistry has become extremely expensive. With passage of years scientific doctors have forgotten the humane aspect of the human machine. Human beings have a soul, which is not detectable by science.

The human machine has feelings of sadness and happiness, frustration and satisfaction, pain and relief, hunger and satiety, fear and courage, greed and contentment, ostentation and shyness, pride and humility, anger and calmness, hopelessness and hopefulness, weakness and powerfulness of will, apathy in empathy, insensitiveness and sensitiveness to environment, hate and love and so on. Unlike the human being, machine does not have friends, family or community. Every human being is highly individualistic and unique quite different from others but the man made machines are identical copies of the proto-type. A machine does not share any of these features of the human body.

All these features of the human body have negative or positive effects on the structure and function of human machine. Can science measure them objec-

tively? Can it objectively determine the effects of all these features on the structure and function of human body? If not then the human body must be looked at more comprehensively and not on the basis of evidence-based scientific medicine alone. The uniqueness of every individual must be recognized and looked at more carefully and comprehensively. It is true that the development of bias by the doctor and the patient must be vigilantly avoided. Doctors and patients must not be carried away by their own experience alone. Doctors must remain open-minded but must not be blinded by the evidence of scientific medicine alone. There is much more to a human being than science can ascertain. The doctors, in addition to physical aspects of the patient must carefully evaluate the emotional, cultural, religious, spiritual, geographical, historical, social and economic aspects of the patient and their effects on his/her health and the way to manage his/her health problems. No doctor can claim to be a good doctor without/having such a humane and holistic approach to the health-problems of the patient. Medical specialists who are masters of their systems/organs-oriented approach must realize that their systems/organs are not isolated from the rest of the body and its environment and are to be looked at in the perspective of a whole human being who is a social being and not a machine. General physicians and dental surgeon, who are less likely to be trapped by the scientific approach, should make a positive effort to have a humane and holistic approach.

Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, said it 2500 years ago, "to observe all, study the patient rather than the disease, evaluate honestly and assist nature". Of all the shortcomings of the modern doctor the most glaring is his/her tendency to total reliance on the results of various investigations and objectively observed data. Every investigation and data should be interpreted in the perspective of the entire patient and his/her background.

Such humane, and holistic approach to the health problems of people, which include the evidence-based scientific approach, carries several advantages. In the first place it brings an awareness that disease is a departure, from normal of a human being in the perspective of the entire environment with which he/she is in continuous interaction. The environment may be internal, external, physical, social, spiritual, economic, geophysical, historical and what not. Hence the reason for this departure from normality may lie

anywhere. As a result this humane and holistic approach gives a thorough understanding of the problem and prevents falling into a wrong tract. Therefore this approach saves energy, time and expense by prevention of expenditure on unnecessary wide-spectrum investigation, which is a common practice of those producing strictly scientific medicine only. It also prevents falling into the trap of erroneous reports/interpretations of laboratory and other investigations.

I encounter a lot of prescriptions where doctors have been erroneously treating tests and not diseases or patients and as a result missing the correct diagnosis and damaging the patients with side effects of powerful drugs and procedures. The humane and holistic approach also brings to light the health-promotive and disease-preventive aspects of the problem as well as the future possibilities for the patient that are to the advantage of the patient and his/her entire community. The humane and holistic approach also facilitates, if needed, the participation of a team of specialists and even non-medical disciplines in the total care of the patient. It also helps in crystallizing the organic nature of disease from the non-organic and narrows the list of differential diagnoses. Consequently, the management of the disease, albeit the patient, becomes precise and yet comprehensive, economical and to the overall benefit of the patient, his family and the community. Therefore, practitioners of modern medicine must not lose sight of the humane and holistic approach to health problems of the patient in the setting of his/her family and community because human is much more than a computer or a robot. This should be the primary concern of medical education. That is why management of human health problems is regarded more of an art than science. The practitioners of this art are far from perfect till they completely abide by their medical ethics.

MEDICAL ETHICS

It will be not only futile but highly dangerous to consult a doctor who does not abide by his professional ethics. A knowledgeable and skillful doctor is of no use to patients and the society if he is unethical in practice. Medical ethics is a code of conduct of practicing doctors/dental surgeons evolved over centuries nationally and internationally that is based on the most admirable human values and principles. Medical profession is the guardian of human life and is responsible for defending living beings from the miseries and death from disease. In performing this duty a doctor has to conduct himself worthy of being called noble. Hippocrates was the first one who wrote an oath of medical conduct for those joining the medical profession, about 2500 years ago. Since then the oath and the code of medical ethics have been amended many times by different countries,

associations, councils, religious groups and colleges. World Medical Association is the largest assembly of doctors from all over the world that has repeatedly deliberated on this subject since 1948. Their recommendations on medical ethics are generally accepted as the guide lines by the medical professions. Medical institutions are required to teach medical ethics to medical/dental students in order to give ethical physicians to the society.

THE DECLARATION OF GENEVA (World Medical Association, 1948, 1968, 1993, 1994)

The 46th General Assembly of World Medical Association met in Stockholm, Sweden in September 1994 and issued the 4th amended copy of the medical oath, as prescribed in the Declaration of Geneva, by General Assembly of World Medical Association, in September, 1948, for the medical students to be taken on admission to the medical profession. The oath and the code of conduct prescribed by the World Medical Association have been adopted universally with some amendments by most countries. The World Islamic Medical Association has made amendments for the Muslim physicians of the world. The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council has also made a few amendments for the Pakistani physicians and dentists. All these amendments are in agreement with the spirit of medical ethics prescribed by the World Medical Association. The author has amended the code of medical ethics for the sake of clarity for medical students and young medical graduates.

THE OATH

- 1 I solemnly pledge to consecrate my life to the service of humanity
- 2 I will give to my teachers the respect and gratitude which is their due
- 3 I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity
- 4 The health of my patient will be my first consideration
- 5 I will respect the secrets which are confided in me, even after the patient has died
- 6 I will maintain by all means in my power, the honor and the noble traditions of the medical profession
- 7 My colleagues will be my sisters and brothers
- 8 I will not permit considerations of religion, nationality, race, party politics, gender, ethnicity, friendship, bleed relationship, animosity, virtuousness, sinfulness, criminal status or social standing to intervene between my duty and my patient (amended by the author);

- 9 I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from its beginning even under threat and I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity
- 10 I will protect human life in all stages under all circumstances, doing my utmost to rescue it from death, malady, pain and anxiety, to be all the way an instrument of Allah's mercy, (amended by PM and DC)
- 11 I make these promises solemnly, freely and upon my honor.
- 5 conduct himself in a manner to earn love and respect of the patient and the society for himself and the medical profession
- 6 pay equal attention to all irrespective of class, cast, creed, color, nationality, religion, monetary returns, regional, lingual or socioeconomic states, gender, blood relationship, friendship, party politics, righteousness, sinfulness, criminal record, or other worldly considerations. (According to Quran one human being, whoever he or she may be, is equal to the entire humanity)

**THE CODE OF MEDICAL ETHICS
DUTIES OF PHYSICIANS IN GENERAL**

An ethical physician shall;

- 1 possess admirable qualities of personality and character the focus of which shall be the welfare of the patient for whom he/she shall be ever ready to do more than duty
- 2 work in service of humanity for the dignity, honor, sanctity and preservation of human life, maintenance of physical and mental health in all stages of development, promotion of healthy life, prevention of diseases, rehabilitation of the sick, relief of human suffering and prevention of death with full responsibility, absolute honesty, sincerity, devotion, compassion and mercy even at personal inconvenience and under threat A Muslim physician regards human life as a trust of God that must be preserved and maintained at all cost with Allah's mercy and compassion, the inspiration for which comes from the Holy Quran that says, "If you kill any human being, except for committing murder or inciting bloodshed, it shall be as if you have killed the entire humanity and if you save one life it shall be as you have saved the entire humanity." (Sura Al-Maidah 9, Ayat 32). Therefore all forms of killing from conception onward that include homicide, or the prevention of serious fetal abnormalities are prohibited. Since inflicting any physical or mental harm can lead to death, an ethical physician must not allow any harm, embarrassment or insult to human being including torture. Since any physical or mental comfort and relief from illness can save life, a physician must provide it
- 3 give emergency care in all situations as a humanitarian obligation unless assured that others are doing the job with equal or better competence
- 4 apart from emergencies, have the right to choose his/her patients and the place and environment where to work
- 7 not discriminate on any grounds except on the ground of emergency or seriousness of the illness that may need out of turn preferential treatment
- 8 always maintain the highest standards of professional conduct
- 9 certify truthfully only that which he/she has personally experienced or verified
- 10 not permit motives of profit or loss to influence the free and independent exercise of professional judgement en behalf of all patients
- 11 in all types of medical practice, be dedicated to providing competent medical services in full technical and moral independence, with compassion and respect to human dignity
- 12 deal honestly with patients and colleagues and strive to expose those physicians deficient in character or competence or who engage in fraud or deceit
- 13 abstain from the following unethical practices;
 - a) Self advertising or canvassing, unless permitted by the law of the country and the code of ethics of the national medical association/council.
 - b) Paying or receiving any fee or other consideration solely to procure the referral of a patient or for prescribing or referring a patient to any source.
- 14 respect the rights of patients, colleagues and other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient's confidence
- 15 use great caution in divulging discoveries or new techniques or treatment through non-professional channels
- 16 adopt continuing medical education for the benefit of his/her colleagues, patients and the community
- 17 comply with all the regulations governing the delivery of health care
- 18 respect the dignity of the dead

- 19 be honest sincere, truthful responsible, caring kind and sympathetic and always ready to do more than his/her duty
- 20 not approve selling or purchasing of human blood or organs
- 21 not exploit financial and social opportunities offered by medical profession, e.g., commercializing secret remedies and exploiting his/her relationship with patients, e.g., charging higher fees from rich parents or exploiting the help of influential patients for personal favors etc
- 22 participate in public health, education
- 23 observe the principles of the Declaration of Geneva on medical ethics approved by the World Medical Association

DUTIES OF PHYSICIANS TO THE SICK

AN ETHICAL PHYSICIAN SHALL;

- 1 always bear in mind the obligation of preserving life
- 2 owe his/her patients complete loyalty and all the resources of his science. Whenever, an examination or treatment is beyond the physician's capacity he should summon another physician who has the necessary ability
- 3 observe absolute confidentiality of all confided in him/her by the patient even after the patient has died
- 4 give emergency care as a humanitarian duty unless he is assured that others are willing and able to give such care equally or more competently
- 5 consider his/her parents as brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers and sons and daughters
- 6 act in the ultimate interest of the patient even at the cost of temporary discomfort, pain or physical and mental weakness to the patient
- 7 not violate the privacy, moral and legal rights of the patient, not examine a patient of the opposite sex or a minor without the presence of an attendant
- 8 not refuse to give consultation because of the inability of the patient to pay fee
- 9 not cast an evil eye on his/her patients
- 10 not impose his/her advice or treatment on patients who do not ask for it

- 11 not operate or do risky procedures without the written consent of the patient or of the next of kin, if the patient is incapable of giving intelligent consent, except in an emergency situation when the physician may have to act even without consent in the best interest of the patient to save life
- 12 not accept transfer of blood or organs without the written consent of the donor and recipient or of the next of kin in case either is incapable of giving consent, except in life saving emergency

DUTIES OF PHYSICIANS TO EACH OTHER, TO MEDICAL STUDENTS AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL WORKERS

AN ETHICAL PHYSICIAN SHALL;

- 1 behave towards his colleagues as he would like to have them behave towards him
- 2 not entice patients from his colleagues
- 3 eagerly share his knowledge, skills and attitudes with fellow colleagues, medical students and other members of the medical profession
- 4 give free consultation to his/her teachers, colleagues, medical students and their dependants
- 5 try to become a role model for his colleagues and medical students
- 6 not interfere in the treatment of patients admitted under care of other colleagues except with their permission or in emergency
- 7 not criticize his/her colleagues in front of the patient
- 8 maintain cordial relation with all members of the medical profession.

In summary the primary concern, of the medical/dental education, should be to produce a knowledgeable, skillful and ethical primary care doctor/dental surgeon who can manage the common medical/dental health problems of the people.

REFERENCES

- 1 Al Quran, Sura Almaidah (8), Ayat 32
- 2 Islamic Code of Medical Ethics, Siraj-2006
- 3 PMDC Code of Ethics, 1969, 1974, 2001