

Usage Ethics in Medical Education in Islamic Countries

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Abstract

The Medical education exists to maintain and regulate the standards of medical practice, protect the interests of the patients, supervise medical students, and give guidelines on ethical issues. The educational Ethics provide general guidelines, and any disciplinary designated and will judge each case on its merits. This is not a comprehensive document and interpretation will depend upon circumstances. Medical students will be given opportunity to justify their actions to apply ethics.

Key words: Education, Medical ethics, Islam

Introduction:

Medical ethics is a branch of ethics that deals with moral issues in medical practice.² Physicians have always been confronted with ethical issues, and having to make difficult decisions is part of their responsibility. Ethics is and always has been an essential component of medical practice.³

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2- The World Medical Association. The WMA Medical Ethics Manual France: The <http://www.wma.net/e/ethicsunit/resources.htm>World Medical Association, 2005. (accessed Dec. 2006).

3-Ibid

Special attention has been paid toward moral ethics in Islam. With this privilege comes the responsibility, that doctors regulate their professional affairs through the Medical Faculties, in the most effective way.

Both doctors and their patients have the right for making independent decisions. However, the code of ethics provides a set of principles prescribed by the Medical Ethics Centers and Medical Faculties, which doctors can use as guidelines in the varying situations, in line with their judgment, experience, knowledge and skills. Whilst the principles guiding medical practice rarely change, application of these principles to new situations will require frequent revision and publication.

This revised Code of Ethics has been prepared by the active participation of the honorable members of the centers. As medical ethics can and does change over time, in response to developments in medical science and technology as well as in societal values, it modifies from one country to another depending on these same factors.¹

Islamic Bioethics

There is no reason why the Muslim approach to medicine should be different from that of the West. Islamic bioethics does not differ profoundly from Western bioethics. Muslim scientists and doctors translated Greek medicine into Arabic. Muslim doctors inherited the Hippocratic Oath along with other elements of

1- The World Medical Association. The WMA Medical Ethics Manual France: The <http://www.wma.net/e/ethicsunit/resources.htm> World Medical Association, 2005. (accessed Dec. 2006).

Greek medicine.¹ In 1981, the International Organization of Islamic Medicine, an institution set up in Kuwait with the aim of formalizing Islamic medical doctrine, issued an *Islamic Code of Medical Ethics*. This text includes an "Oath of the Doctor," which augmented the Hippocratic Oath with reference to the omnipotence of God, as well as the duty of the Muslim physician to observe Islamic standards of modesty in dealing with patients and to live as a Muslim publicly as well as privately.² The *Islamic Code of Medical Ethics* addresses certain issues debated by Western bioethics, often endorsing the sanctity of life. It bans euthanasia or mercy killing, for example, declaring, "A doctor shall not take life away even when motivated by mercy." However, it distinguishes between medical ethics and Islamic law when asserting, "Human life is sacred? And should not be willfully taken except upon the indications specified in Islamic jurisprudence, all of which are outside the domain of the medical profession."³

Educational Ethics

The code is intended to provide guiding principles for use in every day practice for the Medical students in their roles regard to patients, students, community, colleagues, researchers and citizens (people). The Code of Ethics is a public document which endeavors to educate its medical student and the public on

1- Ibrahim Syed, "Islamic Medicine: 1000 Years Ahead of Its Times," in Shahid Athar, ed., *Islamic Medicine* (Karachi: Pan-Islamic Publishing House, 1989), accessed Sept. 27, 2007.

2- "Oath of the Doctor," *Islamic Code of Medical Ethics* (Kuwait: International Organization of Islamic Medicine, 1981), p. 91.

3- *Ibid.* p. 64.

professional ethics. It is intended for the welfare and protection of the individuals and societies with which the profession interacts. It states the responsibility of professionals to society and individuals; and the rights of an individual. It serves public interest. When a Medical practitioner's conduct or practice and consequently registration, are questioned, these are the principles and standards against which s/he will be judged. The Code of Ethics provides general guidelines, and any disciplinary designated by the Center of ethics will judge each case on its merits. This is not a comprehensive document and interpretation will depend upon circumstances. The Students of Medical will be given opportunity to justify their actions to medical ethics.

Duties of Medical Ethics in Islam and International Code of Medical Ethics

1. Duties of Physicians in General:

- A physician shall always maintain the highest standards of professional conduct and should actively participate in continuous Medical Education.
- A physician shall not permit motives of profit to influence the free and independent exercise of professional judgment on behalf of patients.
- A physician shall, in all type of medical practice, be dedicated to provide competent medical services in full technical and moral independence, with compassion and respect to human dignity.
- A physician shall deal honestly with patients and colleagues, and strive to expose those physicians deficient in character or competence, or who engages in fraud or deception.

The following practices are deemed to be unethical conduct:

A. Self advertising by physicians, unless permitted by the laws of the Islamic countries and the Code of Ethics of the Centers of Medical Association.

B. Paying or receiving any fee or any other consideration solely to procure the referral of a patient or for prescribing or referring a patient to any source.

- A physician shall respect the rights of patients, of colleagues, and of other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient confidences.
- A physician shall act only in the patient's interest when providing medical care, which might have the effect of weakening the physical and mental condition of the patient.
- A physician shall use great caution in divulging discoveries or new techniques or treatment through non-professional channels.
- A physician shall certify only that which he has personally verified.

2- Duties of Physicians to the Sick

- A physician shall always bear in mind the obligation of preserving human life.
- A physician shall owe his 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.

- A physician shall preserve absolute confidentiality on all he knows about his patient even after the patient has died.

A physician shall give emergency care as a humanitarian duty unless he is assured that others are willing and able to give such care.

3- Duties of Physicians to each other

- A physician shall behave towards his colleagues, as he would have them behave towards him.
- A physician shall not entice patients from his colleagues.
- A physician shall observe the principles of the “Declaration of Geneva” approved by the World Medical Association.

The Teaching of Medical Ethics

The Curriculum of medical ethics will ensure that adequate information on the apply and Code of Ethics is included in the undergraduate medical college curriculum; and that case studies have been prepared and disseminated to provide guidance to practitioners.

The goal of teaching medical ethics: is to improve the quality of patient care by enhancing professional performance through a consideration of the clinician’s values, beliefs, knowledge of ethical and legal construct, ability to recognize and analyze ethical problems, and interpersonal and communication skills; and consideration of the patient. Students should be able to identify, analyze and should attempt to resolve common ethical problems of medical and clinical nature. All medical faculties and colleges running MD Courses, all of medical centers and universities running the Postgraduate Medical Courses in Iran are advised to incorporate medical ethics into their curriculum.

Relevant books and journals should be made available in the central and departmental libraries of the medical institutions, and

publication of papers on issue related to medical ethics must be encouraged. The centers of medical ethics exhorts its members to develop strategies for dissemination of information about ethics and ethical issues to their colleagues and students, public and patients; and specifically when teaching medical students.

Expectations

It Expects each practitioner to: promote the fundamental principle of responsibility of physicians to the right of individuals and societies to state standards of professional competence, appropriate care, conduct and integrity of Medical Practitioners; *uphold* the ethical principles of medical practice i.e. autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice; ensure the protection of individuals (patients) against harassment, discrimination and exploitation; take their responsibilities as a teacher seriously, be responsive to cultural and religious sensitivities; and declare in a transparent manner, any potential conflict of interest; inculcate these values in students, through instruction and role modeling; promote the education of the public on (a) health issues and (b) their rights to quality care; ensure continuation of practice only when in normal physical and mental health; Bring colleagues to comply with these generally accepted norms of practice and expose physicians and deficient in competence, care and conduct.

Physician Relationship

Patients share with physicians the responsibility for their own health care: The patient has the right to receive information from physicians and to discuss the benefits, risks, costs of appropriate treatment alternatives, and optimal course of action. Patients are

also entitled to obtain copies or summaries of their medical records, to have their questions answered, and to receive independent additional professional opinions. The patient has the right to make decisions regarding the health care that is recommended by his or her physician. Accordingly, patients (or next of kin) may accept or refuse any recommended medical treatment in writing. Patients share with physicians the responsibility for their own health care. The patient has the right to receive information from physicians and to discuss the benefits, risks, costs of appropriate treatment alternatives, and optimal course of action. Patients are also entitled to obtain copies or summaries of their medical records, to have their questions answered, and to receive independent additional professional opinions. The patient has the right to make decisions regarding the health care that is recommended by his or her physician. Accordingly, patients (or next of kin) may accept or refuse any recommended medical treatment in writing. The patient has the right to courtesy, respect, dignity, and timely responsiveness to his or her "health needs". The patient has the right to confidentiality.

Discussion

In Islam, human beings are the crown of creation and are Allah's vice-regents on earth. They are endowed with reason, choice and responsibilities, including stewardship of other creatures, the environment and their own health. Muslims are expected to be moderate and balanced in all matters, including health. Illness may be seen as a trial or even as a cleansing ordeal, but it is not viewed as a curse or punishment or an expression of Allah's

wrath. Hence, the patient is obliged to seek treatment and to avoid being fatalistic.

Islamic bioethics is intimately linked to the broad ethical teachings of the Holy *Qur'an* and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and thus to the interpretation of Islamic law. Bioethical deliberation is inseparable from the religion itself, which emphasizes continuities between body and mind, the material and spiritual realms and between ethics and jurisprudence. The *Qur'an* and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) have laid down detailed and specific ethical guidelines regarding various medical issues. The *Qur'an* itself has a surprising amount of an accurate detail regarding human embryological development, which informs discourse on the ethical and legal status of the embryo and fetus before birth.

Islamic bioethics emphasizes the importance of preventing illness, but when prevention fails, it provides guidance not only to the practicing physician but also to the patient. The physician understands the duty to strive to heal, acknowledging Allah as the ultimate healer. Islamic bioethics teaches that the patient must be treated with respect and compassion and that the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of the illness experience be taken into account.

The main principles of the Hippocratic Oath although acknowledged in Islamic bioethics, but the invocation of multiple gods in the original (Greek) version, and the exclusion of any god in later (Western) versions, led Muslims to adopt the Oath of the Muslim Doctor, which invokes the name of Allah. It appears in the 1981 Islamic Code of Medical Ethics, which deals

with many modern biomedical issues such as organ transplantation and assisted reproduction. In Islam, life is sacred: every moment of life has a great value; even it is of poor quality. The saving of life is a duty, and the unwarranted taking of life a grave sin. The *Qur'an* affirms the reverence for human life in reference to a similar commandment given to other monotheistic peoples: This passage legitimizes medical advances in saving human lives and justifies the prohibition against both suicide and euthanasia. The Oath of the Muslims Doctor includes an undertaking "to protect human life in all stages and under all circumstances, doing [one's] utmost to rescue it from death, malady, pain and anxiety. To be, all the way, an instrument of Allah's mercy, extending ... medical care to near and far, virtuous and sinner and friend and enemy." Islamic bioethics is an extension of Shariah (Islamic Law), which is itself based on 2 foundations: the *Qur'an*, whose basic impulse is to release the greatest amount possible of the creative moral impulse and is itself "a healing and a mercy to those who believe" To respond to new medical technology, Islamic jurists, informed by technical experts, have regular conferences at which emerging issues are explored and consensus is sought. Thus, over the past few years, these conferences have dealt with such issues as organ transplantation, brain death, assisted conception, technology in the intensive care unit and even futuristic issues such as testicular and ovarian grafts. If secular Western bioethics can be described as rights-based, with a strong emphasis on individual rights, Islamic bioethics is based on duties and obligations (e.g. to preserve life, seek treatment), although rights (of Allah, the community and the individual) do feature in bioethics, as does a

call to virtue (Ihsan). The road to moral and spiritual perfection is described as the “quest for God” in Islam. The seekers after God must satisfy 2 conditions: their actions must be governed by the prescriptions or ordinances of the “divine law” and they must ensure that God is constantly present in their hearts.¹

1- Fakhry M. Ethics in Islamic philosophy. In: Craig E, ed. Routledge encyclopedia of philosophy. London, Routledge, 2000
([Http: //www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H018.html](http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H018.html), accessed December 2003).

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4. Ibid. p. 64.
5. Fakhry M. Ethics in Islamic philosophy. In: Craig E, ed. Routledge encyclopedia of philosophy. London, Routledge, 2000 (<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H018.html>, accessed December 2003).