

## **ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON MEDICAL AND PARAMEDICAL CODES OF ETHICS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Ethical considerations and applications are very significant for conducting any professional duty, most especially medical and allied professions like Medical and Surgical care and treatments, Nursing care and Midwifery. This is because medical care is directly concerned with saving life, treatment of ailments and relief of sufferings of sick persons. Various professions codified their peculiar ethical codes of conduct for offering better services to their clients. Since ethical conducts are morally oriented and Islam instructs its followers to always be morally upright, it could rightly be deduced that there are some ethical guidelines within its teachings in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (prophetic traditions) for offering better services to patients by Muslim professionals in medical and allied professions. These includes attitudes between the health worker and the patient, the health worker and his colleagues, personal qualities, confidence, sincerity and dedication to duty, among others. This article is therefore an attempt to highlight on Islamic perspective of ethical conducts for Muslim health personnel, for emulation and execution.

**KEY WORDS: Ethics, Health Team, Health Worker/Personnel, Patient, Relationship.**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The fundamental goals for any member of the health team are to alleviate sufferings, to promote health and to restore a healthy condition to the patient as far as humanly possible. Another fundamental responsibility is prevention of diseases, which is undertaken by community health unit of the health sector. However, these goals could not be achieved successfully by members of the health team without willingness for adhering strictly to the specified codes of ethics in respect of their various professions. These codes of ethics were endorsed internationally through consultations of various professional bodies in the health sector, dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. which marked the period for rapid developments of contemporary medical and paramedical sciences. This is because they are all centered towards the patient, the doctor, the nurse and all other professional members of the health team with regards to their daily responsibilities to the sick, whether in a hospital or elsewhere. The aim of this article is to make an outline of these internationally recognized codes of ethics along with indications for their roots from the teachings of Islam. Before making this attempt it is vital to explain briefly the meanings of concepts of “Medical/Paramedical ethics” and “Health team” because of their significances in health care services.

## **2. Medical/Paramedical Ethics**

The word “ethics” has been defined generally by some writers as the science which guides human actions, and which tends to make a man’s actions and man himself to be good <sup>1</sup>. Ethics are therefore concerned with human actions but specifically involving human behavior. Ethics is also defined as the study of some standards of conduct and the moral judgments and values upon which these standards are based <sup>2</sup>. Medical and Paramedical ethics are therefore those peculiar obligations (which are morally oriented) governing the practice of medicine and other related disciplines in the health sector.

## **3. Health Team**

For efficient functioning of any organization, it is necessary that its members cooperate with one another in the course of discharging their duties so as to achieve success. A hospital is also an organization of workers with the same requirement, but with different goals from those of a factory or a commercial enterprise. While the former are concerned with boosting of their daily productions and realization of monetary profits, the latter is concerned with restoring healthy conditions of life to mankind. In a hospital or any other health institutions there are many professional trained medical and paramedical staffs who are working together just like a football team in a field. Each assigned with specified roles to play. Members of the health team comprise of doctors, nurses, and midwives with various areas of specializations in medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology. Others are pharmacist, medical laboratory technologist, radiologists, dietitians, hospital administrators, ward orderlies, and cleaners to mention just a few.

## **4. Internationally Recognized Medical/ Paramedical Codes of Ethics**

From the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century C.E., various professional bodies in the health sector outlined some ethical statements or codes at international levels, upon which each member is expected to adhere. Below is a generalized outline of these ethical codes, cutting across all sub-divisions of the various professions in the health sector. A general outlook is preferred in because all the functions and duties undertaken by any professional member of the health team are centered on patients care to whom they are responsible. Thus a doctor, a Nurse, a Midwife or any other member of the health team have similar obligations and responsibilities towards welfare of the

patient. For the sake of convenience, these ethical codes are grouped into four sub-topics as follows:

1. Conduct and personality of the health worker.
2. Relationship between the health worker and the patient.
3. Relationship between the health worker and his/ her colleagues.
4. Health worker's general attitudes to his job.

#### **4.1 Conduct and Personality of the health worker:**

Each individual member of the team is expected to possess the following moral qualities:

- a) Self-confidence
- b) Neatness and tidiness
- c) Politeness
- d) Humility
- e) Modesty

##### ***a) Self Confidence***

Self-confidence is one of the essential pre-requisites for performances of duty by any medical or paramedical health worker. In order to be confident on anything, one is expected to possess the required knowledge on it for this purpose all members of the team are obliged to acquire in depth knowledge in their various fields of specializations. Islam encourages all Muslims to endeavor in the pursuits of knowledge in all aspects of life. In Islam acquisition of knowledge is classified into two: the obligatory (*Fard'ayn*) and the non-obligatory (*Fardkifayah*).the obligatory kind of knowledge is that which involves all aspects of worship (*ibadah*)to Allah (S.W.T) such as belief (*Iman*)in Him, how to perform the five daily prayers, fasting, pilgrimage(*Hajj*), how to give out the poor due (*Zakat*)and how to conduct all aspects of social interactions. The non-obligatory type is concerned with all other kinds of knowledge which are useful for rendering services to humanity at large.This kind of knowledge (*Fardkifayah*) is not obligatory upon "every individual member" of the Muslim community, but becomes obligatory on the entire Muslims because its negligence tantamount to blame and punishments of Allah (S.W.T) on them. Alternatively, a percentage of the Muslim population should relieve such a burden upon the whole by acquiring it. Acquiring all kinds of knowledge in the various disciplines of medical and paramedical

sciences by Muslims for having self-confidence in their jobs falls within this category of obligation.

**b) *Neatness and Tidiness***

This involves all aspects of cleanliness. The medical or paramedical personnel is always expected to be clean and tidy, especially while performing his/her official duties. The sick person even though in pains would prefer to be attended to by a neat and tidy hospital staff. Instead of a shabby and untidy one. The prophet (PBUH) was reported to have said that purification (i.e) is half of faith to a Muslim.<sup>3</sup>, as such all Muslim members of the health team should comply with this moral instruction.

**c) *Politeness***

Politeness is a necessary moral quality for any person who is rendering humanitarian services to fellow human beings. A member of the health team is not expected to behave arrogantly towards his/her patients or colleagues. For Muslim medical and paramedical practitioners, a lesson could be derived from the teachings of the Qur'an where Prophet Lukman (PBUH) advised his child as follows:-

“...and swell not thy cheek (for pride),nor work in insolence through  
The earth; for Allah loveth not any arrogant boaster. And be  
Moderate in thy pace and lower the voice.....”<sup>4</sup>

**d) *Humility***

Humility is the opposite of pride and arrogance, which means lowering down your status before another person. Since every member of the health has some responsibilities to discharge towards patients this ethical code becomes necessary and important. This is because any medical or paramedical worker who is proud of himself would consider it to be mean for him/her to render services to patients. In the hospital the patient is always supposed to be the master, while the workers are his servants and not the Vice-versa as its happening today. The Prophet (PBUH) was reported by Abu Hurairah (R.A) to have said:-

“Charity does not in anyway decrease the wealth, and the servant  
(of Allah) who forgives, Allah adds to his respects. and the one who

Shows humility Allah elevates him in the estimation of the people.”<sup>5</sup>

**e) Modesty**

Modesty is a state between pride and humility. A nurse, a medical doctor or any other health worker is expected to be modest while discharging his/her responsibilities. Humility should not be exercised to a higher level so as not to prevent a health worker from performing his/her duties efficiently. A middle course in all affairs, based on sound reasoning has to be undertaken for doing anything. In a *Hadith*, Sa'id bin Talha bin Rukhama narrated that Prophet (PBUH) said:-

“ Each faith (i.e religion) has a virtue of it's own, and the virtue of Islam is modesty. <sup>6</sup>”

It could be realized from this Hadith that being modest in all affairs is in compliance with the teachings of Islam.

#### 4.2 Relationship Between the health Worker and the Patient

The following ethical codes of conduct are to be observed by any member of the health team for rendering efficient services:-

- a) Re-assurance
- b) Compassion
- c) Tolerance/Patience
- d) Alleviation of Suffering
- e) Confidentiality
- f) Respecting religious rights of patients.

**a) Re-assurance**

Any patient would be in a state of fear on the basis of his sickness, especially while thinking on whether he is going to be cured or not it is a moral responsibility upon health workers to re-assure their patients. A Muslim health worker can do this by narrating some sayings of the prophet (PBUH). For example, the following could be used:-

Abu Sa'id Al-khudri and Abu Hurairah(R.A) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said:-

“ No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim,even if it were a prick he receives from a thorn but Allah (S.W.T) expiates some of his sins for that.”<sup>7</sup>

In another Hadith narrated by Abdullah, the prophet (PBUH) said:

“... no Muslim is afflicted with any harm but that his sins will

Be annulled as the leaves of a tree falls down.”<sup>8</sup>

Because of fear and sufferings, some patients may be praying for death. To such patients, a Muslim health worker should reassure them by using the following verse of the Glorious Qur'an and *Hadith* of the Prophet (PBUH):

.....it is righteousness to believe in Allah, and the Last day, And the Angels, and the Book and to be patient in pain (for Suffering) and adversity and throughout the period of panic.<sup>9</sup>

Anas bin Malik (R.A) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

“None of you should wish for death because of a calamity Befalling him, but he has to wish for death he should say: Oh Allah keep me alive as long as life is better for me, and let me Die if death is better for me.”<sup>10</sup>

### **b) *Compassion***

The Muslim health worker has to be compassionate and merciful to his patients. This means that he should be expressing a feeling of concern on conditions of illnesses of patients along with the desire to help. He should address patients with some necessary hope of recovery. The following *Hadith* of the Prophet(PBUH) will be of great help for encouraging the health worker towards such a feeling and concern.

Nu'uman bin Bashir narrated that the prophet (PBUH) said that: the similitude of believers in regard to mutual love, affection, and fellow feelings is that of one body, when one limb of it aches, the whole body aches,<sup>11</sup> and that believers are like one body of a person, if his head aches, the whole body aches.<sup>12</sup>

### **c) *Tolerance***

This ethical conduct refers to patience and endurance which are required from the health worker while performing his duties to patients. The Muslim health worker should be recalling in his mind that whatever he does to patients is going to be rewarded by Allah (S.W.T) on the Day of Judgment, besides the material for him gain in terms of salary package in this worldly life, In a *Hadith* Jabir bin Abdullah (R.A) reported the messenger of Allah ( PBUH) saying:-

“When any one of you goes to see a sick person, he thrust Himself into the mercy of the Lord ( Allah) and when he

Sits there, that mercy enters his being.”<sup>13</sup>

If a person who visits a sick person is to be blessed with the mercy of Allah (S.W.T) according to this *hadith*, then a health worker who always attends to his patients is in a better position to receive more of Allah’s reward and mercy.

**d) *Alleviation of Suffering***

The health worker is expected to do his best to alleviate sufferings of patients. Nurses are more concerned with this ethical conduct because they are more closer to patients than other members of health team. They can achieve this by implementing the specified technical procedures for nursing care of different conditions of diseases. Abu Hurairah (R.A) reported the Prophet (PBUH) to have said:-

“Whosoever dispels from a true believer some grief pertaining  
To this world Allah will dispel from him some grief pertaining  
To the day of Resurrection. whosoever makes things easy  
For someone who is in difficulties, Allah makes things easy  
For him both in this world and the next...Allah is ready to  
Aid any servant so long as the servant is ready to aid his  
Brother.”<sup>14</sup>

**e) *Confidentiality***

This refers to the obligation specified in medical/paramedical codes of ethics for health workers to keep as “top secret” any information received from or seen on a patient concerning his sickness. Such information is not to be disclosed to any other person. Islam is against betrayal of trust on any given information from one person to another, which should be made confidential between the two. Disclosure of any kind of medical information to others is a betrayal of this ethical code of medical and paramedical professions on one hand, while on the other hand it is equivalent to backbiting. This is because no patient would like for any of his anatomical deformity or physiological disorder to be disclosed to other people by any member of the health team. In Islam, backbiting is abhorred as strongly stated in the Qur’an:

O ye who believe! Shun much suspicion: for lo! Some

Suspicion is a crime. And spy not, neither backbite  
One another. Would any of you love to eat the flesh  
Of his dead brother? Ye abhor that (so abhor the other) Lo! Allah is relenting, Merciful.<sup>15</sup>

**f) *Respecting Religious Rights of Patients***

Any patient in a hospital should be given full rights and assistance by members of the health team to practice his religion. There should be no abuse or disregard to a patient's religious duties by any health worker. Preferably Muslim workers should assist Muslim patients to observe their religious duties and Christians or any other religious members of the health team in a hospital should do the same to their respective patients. In essence, patients should be assisted as much as possible for performing their religious duties by health workers.

**4.3 Relationship Between the Health Worker and his Colleagues**

The most essential purpose for working together as a team is to achieve a specific goal. In the case of hospitals, every member of the health team is expected to possess the following ethical conducts for better job performance:-

- a) Co-operation
- b) Friendliness
- c) Maintaining harmonious relations
- d) Loyalty

**a) *Cooperation***

This ethical conduct is required for all members of the health team. To enhance co-operation, Islam has warned against some negative attitudes between people which sever their relations. Once these negative attitudes are shunned, there would be co-operation and love between members of any organization and the society at large. These are suspicion, trying to find faults with others, spying and vying with one another as stated in both the Qur'an and *Hadith* of the Prophet(PBUH). In the Qur'an, these are indicated in chapter 49 verse 12. In a *Hadith*, Abu Hurairah (R.A) said:-

“Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is great falsehood

Do not try to find faults with one another, do not spy On one another, do not vie with one another, do not envy One another, and be servants of Allah, brothers to one Another as you have been enjoined. A Muslim a Brother to a Muslim .He does him no harm,nor let him Down, nor does he despise him...for every Muslim is Sacred to another his blood, his honored his property.”<sup>16</sup>

**b) *Friendliness***

A friendly atmosphere is required within the hospital between all members of the health team. As such each member is expected to be friendly towards his colleagues. Islam calls upon all Muslims to be friendly with each other and not to severe relationship between one another. Without friendly atmosphere, hardly could there be any co-operation in any organization.

**c) *Maintaining Harmonious Relationship***

Every member of the health team should be kind and generous to all his colleagues from different professional fields. The following *Hadith* could be cited in support of this assertion

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was reported to have said:

“He who is deprived of tenderly feelings (towards others) is In fact deprived of good.”<sup>17</sup>

A’ishah (R.A) reported that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) Said:

“Verily Allah is kind, and He loves kindness, and confers Upon kindness which does not confer upon severity....”<sup>18</sup>

**d) *Loyalty***

Loyalty is one of the essential ethical conducts to be observed by health worker. This means that the junior staff in all fields are to be obedient and to follow the orders given by their seniors. For instance, the junior doctor should obey the consultants and the nurse should follow the directives given by physicians or surgeons for treatment. Islam encourages loyalty and obedience to our seniors and those in authority. In the Qur’an, Allah (S.W.T) commanded all Muslims to obey Allah and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority among them.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4.4 Health Workers General Attitude to his job

For better job performance, every member of the health team should abide by the following codes of conducts:

- a) Punctuality
- b) Sincerity and Faithfulness
- c) Avoidance of receiving bribery
- d) Acting within the specified limits of his profession

**a) Punctuality**

Punctuality indicates dedication and respect of time for duty. Reporting exactly at the specified official times for starting and closing a duty shift is very necessary for all health workers so as to avoid inconveniences to patients and colleagues. A Muslim health worker should avoid the habit of either reporting late or closing at an earlier time, all of which are equivalent to fraud in the measure of specified time for offering services to patients. This is prohibited in the Qur'an and is punishable before Allah (S.W.T) on the day of resurrection as stated in this verse:-

Woe unto defenders. Those who when they take measure  
From mankind demand it full. But if they measure unto  
them, cause them loss.<sup>20</sup>

**b) *Sincerity and Faithfulness***

A Muslim member of the health team is required to be sincere and faithful in the course of his duties to patients. He is expected to be sincere and trustworthy in all activities. If he does what is required of him faithful, he would be rewarded by Allah both in this world and in the hereafter.

**c) *Avoidance of Receiving Bribery***

It has been stated in all codes of ethics for the various fields of medical and paramedical professions that members of the health team should accept only those remunerations agreed upon him the contacts of their jobs (i.e. salary and other entitlements). This means that bribery of any kind is not to be received by any member of the health team either from a patient or his relatives. In Islam, receiving bribery is prohibited and it attracts the curse of Allah (S.W.T) both in this world and in the hereafter. Abu Hurairah (R.A) reported a *Hadith* from the Prophet (PBUH) which stated that: Allah has cursed both the receiver and the giver of bribery.<sup>21</sup>

**d) *Acting Within Limits of Ones Profession***

Each member of the health team has specific roles to play with regards to his profession. Unless where it becomes very necessary (such as in cases of shortage of some professional members like doctors), no member of any other profession should perform the roles of others. However, in order to allow for ease to patients, some experienced members of the health team (like nurses) could be allowed to perform some of the duties of doctors (such as administration of intravenous fluids and stitching of wounds) in hospitals with very few of doctors and emergency situations.

## 5. Conclusion

Medical and Paramedical staff are offering humanitarian services to mankind regardless of any racial, religious, tribal or sectional differences. In Islam, any service rendered to the sick by a Muslim is reward able by Allah (S.W.T) on the day of judgment. This is contrary to the idea of some western scholars on medical services that:

“Your reward will be the personal satisfaction that comes from your mind knowing that you helped to make others well.”<sup>22</sup>

From what has been discussed in this article, it could be observed that all the ethical codes of conduct enumerated were supported by the teachings of Islam from the Qur’an and *Hadith*. This is an indication for comprehensiveness of Islam as a complete way of life because even though these ethical codes were compiled by Western scholars, better explanations for each of them could be found in the teachings of Islam. Finally, it could be stipulated that adherence to these ethical codes by all members of the health team (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) would relieve much of the sufferings of patients in our hospitals. The contemporary situation of lower standards of services by members of the health team are as a result of deviations from these ethical codes. All members of the health team (especially Muslims) should struggle positively in order to change the situation.

**End Notes**

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**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT -IJIT**  
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With the submission of this manuscript I would like to undertake that the above mentioned manuscript has not been published elsewhere, accepted for publication elsewhere or under editorial review for publication elsewhere. I warrant that the article is the **Authors' Original Work**.

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