

EDITORIAL

MEDICAL ETHICS AND ISLAM

In Islam, human beings are the crown of creation and are Allah's vicegerents on earth. They are endowed with reason, choice and responsibilities. Muslims are expected to be moderate in all matters, including health. Illness is viewed as a trial rather than a curse. Hence, the patient is obliged to seek treatment and avoid being fatalistic.

Islamic bioethics is ultimately linked to the broad ethical teachings of the Holy Quran and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Islamic bioethics emphasizes the importance of preventing illness, but when prevention fails, it provides guidance not only to the practicing physician but also the patient. The physician understands the duty to strive to heal, acknowledging Allah as the ultimate leader.

In Islam, life is sacred, as the Quran affirms it in the following ayat; "On the account we decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever killed a human being... it shall be as if he had killed all humankind, and whosoever save the life of one, it shall be as if he saved the life of all humankind". This passage legitimizes medical advances in saving human lives and justifies the prohibition against both suicide and euthanasia.

The oath of the Muslim doctor includes "to protect human life in all stages and under all circumstances, doing (one's) utmost 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."

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. These conferences have dealt with issues such as organ transplant, brain death, assisted conception, technology in intensive care unit and futuristic issues such as testicular and ovarian grafts.

If secular Western bioethics can be described as right-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).

In west, the Social system is based upon individual freedom and bioethics has a strong emphasis on individual rights. Islamic social system is based upon duties and obligations for others (Haqook Allah and Haqook al Ebad), which do feature in Islamic bioethics, as dose a call to virtue (Ihsan).

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