**MUSLIM HEALTH WORKERS AND THE CHALLENGES OF COMTEMPORARY WORLD**

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In the name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful. May His peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.)

1. **INTRODUCTION: ISLAM AND THE WORLD**

In Surah 21 verse 107 Allah proclaims that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was sent as a mercy to the whole world. This means that Islam is a total salvation to mankind from all difficulties and all sorts of misery in life. The most important implication of this proclamation is that the Book with Prophet Muhammad proclamation is that the Book which Prophet Muhammad came – Al’quran contain absolute guidance that guarantees, humanity and the world at large, a prosperous, graceful and successful life. It is a book that is impeccably, immaculately and divinely composed. Its secrets are incomprehensible and unfathomable by man, just as its wisdom are inexhaustible. Allah says about it:

“… (This is) a Book, the verses whereof are perfected (in every sphere of knowledge), in detail from one (Allah), who is All-Wise, Well Acquainted (with all things) (Qu’ran 11 verse 1).

Al-Qur’an therefore, promises salvation and grace to the world. This means that humanity shall only be redeemed from doom and misery if it follows the guidance of the Qur’an. Invariably, therefore, it is only when the believers and followers of the Qur’an lead humanity shall it then attains real prosperity and happiness.

The early generations of Muslims who followed the teachings of the Qur’an properly emerged as leaders of humanity and established justice, peace and tranquility. They also cultivated the land and built a sublime civilization. This was civilization that was established on the Quranic precepts. Thus, as proclaimed by Allah, humanity attained grace, mercy and prosperity.

Knowledge was the cornerstone and an integral part of the Islamic civilization. It was its propelling force, its live wire and nerve centre. On the basis of it, all aspects of life were developed to a point of excellence. These include statecraft, economy, social organization and setup, delivery, military organization and training, etc.

The advancements reached in medical sciences and health care delivery are quite tremendous. It was considered a virtue religious duty to render help to the needy and to assist the person in difficulty. This is the guiding and overriding principle upon which Muslim health care delivery science and services. And it is against this background that the challenges facing Muslim health workers are hereby discussed. As a preamble an elaborate reference is made to the glorious past, particularly as it relates to the medical sciences and practice in Muslim history. This is done for two important purposes. First, to invoke the achievement of our fore fathers in the past to serve as a motivating factor for us, as we face the challenges of our world today. And secondly, use the past as a background for analyzing the present and propounding a correct perspective of the future.

* 1. **MEDICAL SCIENCES AND HEALTH CARE DELIVERY IN MUSLIM** **HISTORY**

Health care delivery can be said to be one of the most glittering aspects of Islamic civilization, in both theory and practice, Muslim history is filled with a number of breakthrough in Medicine. The Qur’an has laid down a number of medical principles, just as it has defined the theoretical frameworks of medical science and practice. According to Ibn al-Qayyim in his book – The Prophetic Medicine – the basic principles of medicines (pertaining to the physical body) are three. These are: preserving (maintaining) the already existing health (well being) of the body; prevention from infection or harm; and purging out/eliminating of disease causing substances or agents. Ibn al-Qayyim asserted that all these three basic principles have been laid down in the Qur’an. In order to demonstrate this Ibn al-Qayyim quoted two verses of Suratul Baqarah. One in verse that come with the injunction of fasting and the other is the one that enjoins Hajj (pilgrimage). These are verses 184 and 196 respectively. In the first case, the sick person is exempted so that his declining health condition shall be checked (i.e. to prevent further deterioration), while the traveler is equally exempted in order to prevent him from harm that may arise out of the combination of the fatigue of travelling and the weakness resulting from hunger. In the second case (i.e. verse 196) Ibn al-Qayyim says the sick person, and that has some disease on his head are allowed to shave their heads unlike other pilgrims so that they eliminate the disease causing organisms.

In addition to the above, the Qur’an also alludes to some medicinal uses of some substances like honey, milk, etc. The Prophet (SAW) in many of his traditions also instructs Muslims to practice medicine and seek for medical treatments from ailments. In an hadith reported by Ahmed Ibn Hambal, Trimidhi and Abu Dawud, on the authority of Usamah Ibn Shuraik, the Prophet (SAW) was asked about medical treatment and he responded saying “O servants of Allah, seek medical treatment for Allah did not create a disease without creating its cure”.

The concern of Prophet (SAW) did not only stop at imploring Muslims to practice medical or health work or seek for medical treatment, the Prophet (SAW) went to the extent of warning against administering medical treatment without the requisite qualification or experts. This is also an outright condemnation of failing in health work. The Prophet (SAW) in an hadith reported by Abu Dawud on the authority of Aminr Ibn Shuaib says that however falsely claim to be a medical practitioner while he is not certified to profess it shall be liable (to all damages and costs).

The verses above and the prophetic traditions do not only propound the theoretical framework of Medical Sciences and Practices in Islam, but are also the fundamental motivating factors that propelled early Muslims to make tremendous contributions to medicine and health work in both theory and practice. Our discussion on Muslims’ contributions to medicine shall comprise these two levels

1. **MUSLIMS CONTRIBUTIONS TO MEDICINE: THE THEORETICAL/INTELLECTUAL ASPECTS**

A short seminar paper like this cannot comprehensively present the intellectual contributions of early Muslims to medicine. Only some of the outstanding ones are, therefore mentioned here.

Rasheed (1984) narrates some of these as follows:

1. Ibn Sina’s (Avicenna – 1037) works “Qanuntial – Tibb (The Canon of Medicine) and ‘Arjuza’ are considered the foundation of modern medical science.
2. Ali Ibn Abbas (970 A.C) wrote twenty volume on theory/and practice of medicine. It was printed in Lyons in 1523 A.C.
3. ArRazi (Rhazes 923 A.C) wrote two hundred works on medicine, published in Venice in 1510 A.C. He is famous for his works on smallpox and measles.
4. Abul-Qais (Abul-Casis) developed surgical instruments and performed operations.
5. Ibn Baitar was the founder of Veterinary Medicine. He travelled all over the East to find medical herbs. The word “Veterinary” was derived from his name “Baitar”.

Locally here, the Sokoto Jihad leaders and scholars has also made overwhelming intellectual contributions for medicine. Muhammad (1995) mentioned works/treatises of Amir at Muminina Muhammad Bello. These are:

1. Ujalatul-Rakib fil Tibb al-Saib (A Treatise for a Rider on Genuine medicine)
2. Al-Qawiul al-Nabaws (prophetic Medicine)
3. Al-Qawlul MAnthur fi Bayani Adwayati llatil Basur (An Account on Medications of the Disease of Piles – Hemorrhoids).
4. Alqawalal Sana fi Wujuhil Taylin WAl Tamash-shi bil Sana (An account on Senna Leaves and the ways in which it is used as a laxative).
5. Al-Nasirina fi Ma Qila fi Man Balagha Minal Sirar bi Ayn (what has been said on diseases of the eyelids i.e. conanctua)
6. Awja’al Ayn al-Mawarid al-Nabawiyyahfi al-Masa-il al-Tibbyyan (diseases of the eye and prophetic provisions on their medications)
7. Talkhis al-Tibb (a short treatise on medicines) (pp 75-76)

Muhammad (1995) also mentioned the work of sheik Abdullahi Ibn Fodiya in this regard title: “Masail Lil Insan al-Muta-allaga bil ADyar”, wherein Sheik Abdullah discussed the importance of maintaining good health and the ways by which a healthy mind could be developed.

The aspect of our discussion on the intellectual contributions of Muslims to Medicine may not complete without mentioning the ‘Prophetic Medicine Imam Ibn al-Qayyim. This book is a masterpiece in this field. It is such a distinctive illustration of Islamic perspective of Medicine that one may even be compelled to suggest that it is a compulsory reading for every health workers.

1. **MUSLIMS CONTRIBUTION TO MEDICINE: THE PRATICAL ASPECT**

The intellectual contributions of Muslims to medicine as presented above may appear to be astonishing to most of us. However, the practical aspect of health care delivery in earlier and medieval Muslim history would certainly be more marvelous. What is most interesting in this regard is the fact that the practice of health work started right from the times of the Prophet (SAW) and continued to progress the ages and developed to its peak in the times of the Abbasids and subsequent generations of rulers.

There is no doubt that health care delivery started with the Prophet (SAW) advices and himself. His various medical advices and prescriptions are a testimony to this. To sum up, the medical counsels of Prophet (SAW) cover both the individual (personal hygiene) and the community (community health) just as the encompass preventive and curative aspects of medicine. A good reference materials in this regard is Ibn-al-Qayyim’s book mentioned earlier – i.e. Prophetic Medicine.

Real and actual practice of health work at the time of the Prophet (SAW) was epitomized by two important things. The first is the first aid services rendered mostly by female companions of the Prophet (SAW) on battle fields. These are too numerous to mention. Secondly, the Prophet’s Mosque accommodated what can be described as the first clinic in Muslim History. It can as well be termed as a sort of Military hospital because all the injured companions in the battle of the ditch (Khandaq) were treated there. The same thing applied to those injured in other battles fields. A lady companion called Rafidah al-Harltiyyah was said to have set up a tent in the Prophet’s Mosque in which she used to treat war casualties. This tent was constructed within the Prophet’s mosque, Rafidah can therefore be considered to be the first Muslim Nurse.

Generally, it can be said that, health care delivery continued to developed during the times of the four rightly guided but was strictly institutionalized until the later years during the Umayyad, Abbasid and subsequent dynasties. In these later years, health care delivery was crystallized by the establishment of big comprehensive and specialist hospitals. Some of the outstanding ones are mentioned below.

**ESTABLISHEMENT OF HOSPITALS IN MUSLIM HISTORY**

Sheik Mustapha as-Sibal enumerated some of these hospitals and described their sizes, compositions, services and resources. He however started by making a general discussion on the development of hospitals in early Islamic history. He said the first full fledged hospital in Islam was founded by the Umayyah Caliph – Walid Ibn Abdul-Malik. It was a specialized hospital exclusively for lepers, and specialist doctors were employed for them. Thence forth, the establishment of hospitals continued.

As-Sibal further said that there were two types of hospitals: the mobile and the stationed. The first type is the one that was known at the times of the Prophet (SAW), and this was later improved upon such that all necessary components are facilities like dispensary, pharmacy, feeding, toilets, etc were available. In the case of the second category, the development was so rapid and tremendous that, there was hardly any Muslim city or town without one or more hospital(s) or clinic(s). in Cordora alone, there were fifty (50) hospitals. The hospitals were of various specialization. Some of them were also medical colleges with big lecture halls. Seasoned and veteran doctors used to go round the wards with students diagnosing and treating patients and conducting lessons at the same time. There were also big dispensaries and pharmaceutical stores.

The general hospitals were divided into two sections for males and females, and were numerous wards. Every type of illness had exclusive wards. There was the OPD, the Eye ward, the Casualty ward, the Psychiatry ward etc. Each ward was headed by an experienced doctor, and all the doctors were headed by an overall Consultant Doctor called – Sa’ur. Each doctor had a specific time of at which he must call and stay at his ward,. Each ward again used to have nurses and other auxiliary staff, cleaners, cooks, etc. all of whom had their respective routines. Each hospital had a dispensary and a pharmaceutical store containing all sorts of medicines. No medical student would be certified as a doctor unless he went through an examination in the hands of the best medical doctor in the Caliphate. It was even reported that in the year 319 A.H. (931 AD) during the reign of Caliph al-Muqtadir, one of the doctors made a mistake in treating a patient and the latter died. The Caliph directed that all the practicing doctors in Baghdad at that time should be subjected to a special examination. There were more than 860 doctors in Baghdad alone, besides the seasoned ones that were not subjected to that examination.

Another important distinctive feature of the hospitals according to As-Sibai is that there were medical libraries attached to each of the hospitals which can be consulted by doctors and students alike. It was reported that Ibn-Tulun’s hospital in Cairo had a library whose collection was well over 100,000 volumes including other fields of study.

There was no discrimination in the visiting and consultation arrangements of the hospitals.

Some of the biggest and most popular hospitals are the following:

1. AL-MUSTAPHA AL-ADUDI (AL-ADUDI HOSPITAL IN BAGHDAD)

It was established in 371 AH, its site was chosen by al-Razi through an empirical study of the weather/climatic conditions of the four directions of Baghdad with pieces of raw meat. The location of the piece that appeared to be the freshest the following morning was then chosen for the site. It had 24 doctors and in 449 AH all necessary hospital facilities were placed on constructed in it.

1. AL-MUSTASH-FA AL-NURI (AL-NURY HOSPITAL IN DAMASCUS)

It was founded in 539 AH (1154 AD). It was strictly dedicated to the service of the poor, the needy and the indigent. Rich men were however, often allowed admission into it. It had a psychiatry section. It continued to exist up to 1317 AH. That is about 778 years, until it later came to be occupied by the Faculty of Medicine of University of Syria.

1. AL-MUSTASH-FA AL-MANSUR (AL-MANSURI HOSPITAL IN DAMASCUS)

It was founded in 638 AH (1284). It had all the kinds of specialists and facilities obtainable in the ones mentioned above, although it had its distinctive features.

1. MUSTASH-FA-MARAKESH (MARAKESH HOSPITAL IN MOROCCO)

It was established by Amir Al-Mansur Abn Yusuf, one of the Al-Muwahhidien (Almohads) rulers.

Sheikh As-Sibai concluded his descriptions of the superior standards the hospitals and other health services in those years of Muslim history by quoting the testimony of a German orientalist – Max Meyerhof – as he describes the backward and horrible conditions of European hospitals at these times in comparison to the Muslim ones. He says:

“Verily! Arabian Hospitals and Medical Institutions that existed in Muslim cities of old do really present to us very serious and important lessons the significance of which we can never realize unless by making simple comparison with our hospitals of that very time.

* 1. **MUSLIMS AND HEALTH WORK TODAY**

One needs not to write lengthy paragraphs to describe the pathetic condition in which Muslim communities live today. Our backwardness in health work is as bad as in any other endeavour. The backwardness is manifested in two dimensions. The first dimension is the shortage of medical manpower in all Muslims communities. The second dimension is the substandard condition of health institutions and services in Muslim lands.

In Nigeria, this problem is so private medical organization and institutions are dominated by non-Muslim medical and paramedical practitioners. The second dimension of this pathetic condition manifests itself in the fact that, even in place like Kano, where the richest of Muslims live, and where the most learned of scholars abound, Muslims have not been able to establish any health care facility or medical institution that can match any of those established by non-Muslims like ECWA Eye Hospital etc.

* 1. **MUSLIM HEALTH WORKERS AND THE CHALENNGES OF CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

In the foregoing, a lengthy exposition has been made if the tremendous contributions by earlier Muslims to medical sciences and health care delivery. On the other hand a brief through graphic description was made of the pathetic and backward position of Muslims in health work today. On the basis of this the challenges facing Muslims workers in contemporary world. It is often said that a more realistic view and plan of the future can only be achieved with a good and sufficient knowledge and understanding of the past and the present.

In discussing the challenges, one is consciously proposing agenda or rather suggesting the future directions of Muslim workers in Nigeria and the Muslim world in general. The challenges are discussed below:

1. **THE HISTORICAL CHALLENGE: TRANSLATING THE GLORIOUS PAST IN THE PRESENT**

It is common to hear or read Muslims often referring to our glorious past. We take a lot of pride in that, and with nostalgia we lament over our present unworthy condition. A lot of euphoria is generated and aroused, and then it will end up there and then. No conscious effort is made towards regaining the past glory.

After going over our discussion of the achievements of the earlier generations of Muslims in Medicine and health work, one wonders if at all the West has made any original significant contributions in this regard. Except for the new machineries and equipment that are newly invented, this assertion is very close to the truth. The greatest challenge facing Muslim health workers today is that of translating the past into the present. This challenge by its very essence suggests a change in the cause of history.

This mean once again we challenged to chat out a course of action that would check the historical tide, by taking the leading position role in this regard.

Although this sound as fantastic and perhaps unrealistic, this write believes that whatever the case may be it is better than the usual narration of our greatness in the past without getting motivated to work for better future. Throughout human history, people with great minds and purposed missions have already achieved the most impossible of things – changing the cause of history. This writer considers this a great challenge in the contemporary world of clash of civilizations.

1. **THE INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE: BETWEEN ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE**

A careful contemplation around the historical challenge as discussed above reveals that in its very essence it is epitomized in the intellectual challenge. The Ummah and by specification the Muslim health workers can bring back our lost glory by embarking on a diligent, untiring and visionary intellectual work. Knowledge has always been the fool with which history is made of changed. Muslim health workers like all other Muslim professionals must embark upon serious scholarship.

The intellectual challenge facing Muslim health workers has three dimensions. In the first place, the Muslim health worker must know the essential and basic teachings of Islam. Specifically however, the Muslim health worker must have sufficient knowledge on aspects of Islamic teachings that heave direct relevance to and bearing on health care delivery. This is then the most distinguishing factor that makes him to be different from others.

In the other dimension, the Muslim health worker is intellectually challenged in the sense that he/she must strive and work hard to achieve professional excellence. He/she must acquaint himself or herself with the latest breakthroughs and developments in the medical sciences and health work. In the contemporary world of information explosion and penetration of the computer into almost all aspects of life, Muslim health workers should be conversant with all the necessary computer applications in health care delivery.

Muslim health workers should endeavour to be potent and enduring in pursuing professional progression and growth through the normal professional ladder. It is sad to note that today, most of our young Muslim medical doctors and nurses prefer jobs that fetch them easy and quick money, than remaining in appointments that in the long run increase their professional qualifications. This factor may be part of the reason behind the death of Muslim Consultants as Specialists.

The third dimension of the intellectual challenge is the Islamization of Medical Science and Health Care Delivery. This means widening the scope of medical sciences and health care delivery work to incorporate the spiritual component of man. Modern medicine, as a product of material list science does not recognize the divine and the spiritual. Its definition of disease and cure is therefore confined within empirical paradign and the materialist episteme.

The Islamic perspective of Medicine is based on the Tawhidi episteme. This implies that disease and cure are subject to the will of Allah. Disease causing organisms can only affect a person, and cause disease in him/her if Allah wills it. In the same way, treatment in whatever form can only bring about cure if and when Allah wills it.

Recognizing this spiritual component in man, the Islamic perspective of medicine believes that certain kinds of illness require spiritual treatment. Exorcism and casting out demons with Ruqiyyah (Qur’anic recitation and authentic Sunnah supplications) is not only believed to be effective but valid and authentic.

The epistemological and methodological foundations of modern science have for a long time been challenged, and their limitations exposed. These are no longer axiomatic facts that cannot be faulted. It is necessary to open new vistas in medicine and health work. For Muslim health workers the challenge here is that they should redefine the scope of medical sciences, re-delineate their paradigms on the basis of the Islamic epistemology. This is what is meant by the Islamization of the Medical Science and Health Care work.

1. **THE HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGE: FORMULATING COMPREHENSIVE ISLAMIC HUMARITARIAN HEALTH PROGRAMME**

We are all living witness to the huge humanitarian efforts of non-Muslims pertaining to all kinds of medical philanthropic works. These are taking phase and at the same time expanding both at local and global levels. Christian medical foundations and organizations which provide free or subsidized humanitarian medical services in Nigeria and the world at large are too numerous to mention here.

In recent years, a number of non-govermnent philanthtropic and humanitarian organizations have sprung up. Most of these NCOs have good and credible aims and agendas. Others do have ulterior motives. And this is especially true in respect of women related organizations which claim to be either combating sexually transmitted diseases or promoting women reproductive health and reducing infant mortality rates. However, some of the activities of these organizations are politically motivated. Others are really aiming at entrenching institutionalizes family planning under the guise of promoting women reproductive health.

The greatest challenge facing Muslim health workers in this regard is the need to articulate comprehensive humanitarian (medical/health) programmes. This involves initiation of small scale assistance to be rendered in existing public hospitals (like the ones currently rendered by ISMAN) initiating community basic medicine and health care programmes and services. This can include setting up community based medical infra-structures like dispensaries and cottage hospitals, establishing community based health institutions and equipping them with all the necessary teaching and learning facilities and equipment and thereafter seeking for accreditation for the courses. This will certainly go a long way in reducing the problem of shortage of medical and health care manpower.

Muslim health workers are also challenged formulate an agenda for globalizing Islamic medical philanthropy. This means that Muslim health workers need to set up international health organization that can render medical assistance across nations and continents. Ar-Basar Foundation for example, is one such type of organizations referred to here.

1. **THE MORAL AND ETHICAL CHANLLENGE: PROJECTING THE ISLAMIC ETHICAL CODES AND PRACTICE IN HEALTH WORK**

The Islamization of Medical science and health work as proposed or rather suggested in (1.3{c} above necessarily includes the Islamization of medical practice. Islam as a comprehensive way of life has taught us even things that we normally consider unimportant like toileting. Islam definitely has moral and disciplinary codes that guide the health work. Some of the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) are a testimony to this fact. Muslim health workers need to learn these ethics and project them in their duties as they carry out treatment or any sort of assistance to patients.

* 1. **CONCLUSION**

The challenges discussed in this paper are not necessarily all that can be said in this regard. Whatever the case may be, however, one important point needs to be emphasized. This is the fact that Muslim health workers and the whole Muslim Ummah must change its attitude of lack of seriousness with life. The culture of indolence, apathy and ineptitude must all be shunned if at all we want to regenerate ourselves and regain our lost glory. If we restate our commitment to Islam, put our trust in Allah and work harder in our various endeavours. We definitely succeed Allah says: “Those who strive (with sincerity) in our cause shall we guide to our path (of righteousness). Surely Allah is with the righteous ones” (Qur’an 29:69).