

The Reasons for the High Standard of Islamic Hospitals

In the Islamic Empire, the hospitals attained a golden era unsurpassed in previous history. The reasons behind such a high standard include:

1. Being part of a civilization as a whole: The people were prosperous; thus, they were capable of taking care of their health and of seeking the best available treatment. Also, Islam stresses the necessity of seeking treatment of every disease; the Prophet says, "For every disease, God created a cure." The required sciences for good medical care were at a high standard e.g. the Arabs were advanced in chemistry, mathematics, administration, pharmacy, medicine, etc. They gave the world the system of numbering which have replaced the cumbersome Roman numerals.

The world owes to them the knowledge of the following chemical reactions, namely sublimation, precipitation, filtration, distillation, etc. The great Arab chemist Jabir Ibn- Hayan discovered sulphuric and nitric acids. According to Webster Dictionary, the words sugar, alcohol, alkali, syrup, coffee, cotton, all are Arabic words. Fielding H. Garrison, the author of the well-known work on the "History of Medicine" said: "... The Saracens themselves were the originators not only of algebra, chemistry, and geology, but of many of the so-called improvements or refinements of civilization, such as street lamps, window-panes, firework, stringed instruments, cultivated fruits, perfumes, spices, etc..."

2. High prestige of physicians: The physicians in this era earned a high prestige. Although anyone, irrespective of his social status, can study medicine, yet the route was long and tedious. He had to finish Islamic studies, philosophy, astronomy, art, chemistry, etc. before being accepted as a medical student. Therefore, the physician was a cultured person who had wisdom and knowledge. In fact, the Arabic translation of a physician is "Hakim" which means sage. In the 9th and 10th century, the Court-Physician was in the protocol ahead of the Chief-Justice.

Many eminent physicians, as we will discuss later, showed enough talent, social knowledge, political capabilities, and wisdom to be appointed by the Caliphs as prime ministers (Viziers). Owing to the high prestige and connections of physicians, generous funds for hospitals were easily obtained.

3. Rulers' involvement in public services: The Caliphs of the Islamic empire built magnificent hospitals for one or more of the following reasons:

- a. Religion: Their religion stated that money spent on charity is a good investment for Judgment Day.
- b. Eternity: The Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt sought eternity by building pyramids, the rulers of Islam sought the same thing by building mosques, hospitals, and schools carrying their names.
- c. Politics: To show their people that they cared, and were interested in them, the rulers–built hospitals.

Whatever the motive of the ruler, the population benefited and good hospitals were erected.

4. Adequate financing to run the hospitals: The rulers set aside generous funds to run these hospitals. Also, the philanthropists gave generously, thus following their religious beliefs and imitating their rulers. In Islam, there is a special system called Al–Waqf. A person can donate part or all of this wealth to charity.

The government takes care of such a donation, and its revenues help to maintain and build mosques, hospitals, and schools. Another source of funds and an important pillar of Islam is alms–giving (2 1/2% of property value). Collected alms goes to the state treasury which takes care of charitable organizations. Very few hospitals in the Islamic era were private. Thus, patient's fees constituted an unimportant source of funding.

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