

B. INTEGRATED CARE IN THE HISTORY OF ARAB MEDICINE – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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This presentation featured the highly developed medical knowledge, practices, medical writings, textbooks and institutions (libraries, hospitals and pharmacies) that existed during the enlightened days of the Arabic/Islamic civilization spanning the 8th to 12th centuries.

Ar-Razi and Ibn Sina, two of the great physicians renowned in Arab medicine, were known for a comprehensive approach to medical care based on a vast knowledge from sophisticated writings in a variety of fields and disciplines. They were referred to as Al-Hakim, a term, which means “the wise” and was bestowed on scholars who were recognized as teachers, scientists, philosophers, travelers, linguists, and artists; they were charitable and held the highest moral and ethical values and of course, also medically qualified and licensed. The wide exposure to these disciplines in addition to medicine expanded the perspectives of evaluating patient’s physical ailments and helped to place them into the wider context of the mental and social framework of patients and their families.

Many deserving an Al-Hakim title believed and practiced an integrated approach to patients’ evaluation and care and have also been acknowledged for their achievements and discoveries in medicine. They were also visionaries in term of establishing key medical institutions and medical systems that formed the foundation of today’s counterparts. The hospital and the pharmacy are examples of the former while positions/functions such as the chief physician who administers qualifying exams for aspiring physicians and the inspector who ensures the validity and safety of chemicals and drugs sold in pharmacies are examples of the latter. During the

Omayyad and especially the Abbasid phase of the Arabic rule, institutions devoted to knowledge and care flourished. Of a particular note, is Dar Al Hikma, an extensive multi-specialty library established in Baghdad and housed numerous books initially translated to Arabic; the library books grew rapidly with the numerous contributions from Arabic scholars as the new culture moved from the absorption into the creation phase. This monument was indeed an integrated center of learning that continued growing for centuries.

Also of interest is to learn about the early Arab hospitals, which were documented as having staffs of dozens of specialists including physiologists, oculists, surgeons and bonesetters.

They had special wards for the mentally ill and separate wings for men and women. These hospitals were often incorporated into large charitable foundations and were supported by endowments made by powerful and wealthy individuals. It is indeed intriguing to read the dedication statement of hospitals as articulated by one of the Abbasid Khalif 1200 years ago and compare the text to a 20th century hospital:

“I dedicate this hospital to my peers and inferiors, and constitute this wakf to the benefit of the king and the mamluk; the soldier and the prince; the great and the small; the freeman and the slave; for men and for women.”

Al-Mansur

“The 20th century hospital is characterized today as an institution in which every man, woman and child, regardless of race, color, creed or social status, gets the best care that medical

science can offer the sick and the injured.”

Mac Eachern’s editorial on hospital standardization, 1936.

It is appropriate to mention a leader of early Arab medicine. He was both a great physician and a believer in psychosomatic medicine. Abu Ali al-Husayn bin Abdallah bin Sina (980–1037) studied and wrote *The Canon of Medicine*, the most important textbook of medicine until the 15th or 16th centuries. The five-book text was structured in distinct sections:

- Book I: On “universals,” a systematic survey of medical theory, etiology, hygiene, therapy and surgery
- Book II: Simple drugs
- Book III: Diseases arranged from head to toe
- Book IV: Some general conditions
- Book V: Compound drugs

Gerard of Cremona translated the book into Latin; the *Canon* became required reading up to the 17th century for the European world.

In closing, Yahia told an anecdote told about Ibn Sina with respect to his psychosomatic medicine skills. He was asked to examine a young man who became increasingly sick and had lost weight without an apparent physical illness. As Ibn Sina examined the pulse of the patient, he talked to him about women and love and monitored the acceleration of his pulse as the conversation became more specific with neighborhood locations and finally, with the house of the young lady with whom the patient was in love. Ibn Sina diagnosed him with “love sickness” and suggested that the only remedy was to unite him with his loved one. Of course, the story ends happily and he is cured.